The Silver Casket

A Tale

By

A·L·O·E

Maggie Wilson

Lagion Wolfville

Miss Maggie Breakfast

Miss Maggie Wilson

THE

SILVER CASKET;

OR,

THE WORLD AND ITS WILES.

By

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THE SILVER CASKET.

CHAPTER I.

A MORNING WALK.

"EARLY *to bed, and early to rise, is the way to be healthy, wealthy, and wise!* So says the old proverb, but so thinks not my old cousin, or she'd breakfast before eleven o'clock, and go to rest before midnight!" exclaimed young Bertie Vane, as, accompanied by his sister and elder brother, he was crossing a field near Aspen Hall, the residence of some relatives of his father.

"I wonder what Lady Waters would say to your calling her your old cousin!" observed

the laughing Diana; "I should like to see you so free and easy before her, Master Bertie!"

"Well, she is a sort of a cousin, a cousin two or three times removed, I never understand one bit what that means," said the merry-eyed boy, "but it is something that makes it proper for you to courtesy, and Stenie to bow to her, as you never think of doing to Aunt Eva."

"Aunt Eva! oh, she's so different!" exclaimed Diana.

"I should just say that she is!" cried Bertie. "Aunt Eva is our mother's own youngest sister, and as good, and almost as pretty as our mother. Lady Waters is no more like Aunt Eva than—than—" Bertie looked round for an illustration, "than a great staring holly-hock is to a lily of the valley!"

"Aunt Eva always looks to me like the moon," observed Diana, "so pure and pale, and yet bright. Most like the moon when she is waning, for I often think when I look at her that she is fading away day by day."

Stephen the elder brother, a youth of about sixteen, was walking on in advance, hitting each projecting bough as he passed with his

cane, and seldom deigning to join in conversation with Diana and Bertie; the last observation, however, reached him, and turning round he remarked, "Aunt Eva is suffering from some mortal illness; I've heard that she might drop down dead any minute."

"I hope with all my heart that she'll live till she's ninety!" cried Bertie with boyish fervour. "I care more for her in her little cottage than I do for Lady Waters with all her grandeur and money!"

"You don't mean to say," observed Stephen drily, "that you would rather live in Mayflower Cottage, sharing Aunt Eva's toast and water-gruel, than in Aspen Hall."

"With all its feasting, and boating, and fishing, and fine company, and powdered footmen!" exclaimed Diana, who was delighted with the grandeur of Lady Waters' abode.

"I was not talking of living there," replied Bertie Vane, "I never had a fancy for gruel, and I like feasting and boating very well; though as for company," he added, "I always feel like a fish out of water in the drawing-room! I fancy that all grand ladies and gentlemen have a dislike for boys, wish them

fifty miles off, and think it a pity that they ever come home for the holidays. When we came down here last week, Cousin Eleanor held out the tips of her fingers to me, as if she thought that my hand must dirty her kid gloves! As for her big brother Warren, he takes much more notice of his dog than of me, I'm his cousin a lot of times removed!"

"It is not likely that a fine dashing young sportsman should care for a little whipper-snapper like you," observed Stephen, knocking off the head of a thistle as he spoke.

"I don't care for him!" retorted Bertie; "he's not a chap to my liking, for all his big whiskers and his blustering air!"

"He rides splendidly, and is a first-rate shot; he's a glorious fellow, Warren!" said Stephen, addressing his words to himself rather than to his young brother.

"I know that he likes to sit at table very long over his claret till he gets very red in the face, and he smokes, and he bets, and he uses such words! I'd have my ears boxed if I did so!"

"You shall have them well boxed for talking like a donkey!" cried Stephen angrily,

aiming a blow with his cane at his brother. By a quick movement the boy so avoided the blow, that it only knocked off his cap.

"I say, Di," observed Bertie confidentially to his flaxen-haired sister, who stayed beside him as he picked up his cap, while Stephen stalked on over the stubble; "Stenie is getting a regular bully. He was always hard upon me, even at Mr. Gray's, but since we've come to Aspen Hall, he's taken to treating me as if I were a dog."

"But you do talk rather provokingly," suggested Diana.

"I can't help talking, it's my nature, I like to say out my mind! Do you know, Di, I half wonder sometimes how papa and mamma, who are so particular themselves, let us come to pass the holidays at Aspen Hall. If they knew what sort of a chap Warren is, and how Stenie thinks it grand to be like him, I think that they'd be half afraid."

"I'm glad that they are not," said Diana; "it would be tiresome to be boxed up in London, with Mr. and Mrs. Gray all the year round. I like Aspen Hall of all things, and if we did not come here I do not know where

we could go, as long as papa and mamma are in China. Aunt Eva's cottage is too small to hold us, and it would be dull work for us young folks to be always with one who is never out of pain!"

"Oh, Aspen Hall is the jolliest place! there's no doubt of that," observed Bertie; "I should like the house uncommonly, if I liked the people in it, but they're a deal too grand for me. I'm glad that Aunt Eva is so near, and that we are to walk over and breakfast with her every morning; I love to see her, and besides one would get so horridly hungry by eleven!"

"I did not expect Stenie to come with us," observed Diana.

"He only comes because the best view of the church-tower is from Auntie's window, and he is making a sketch of it for Eleanor's album," said Bertie; "don't you see that he is carrying his drawing-block in his hand. I don't think that he cares much for Aunt Eva; not one quarter so much as I do!"

"Nor as I do!" chimed in Diana; "I can't bear to think of her dying. Would you not fancy that to know that she is so ill,

must make her feel quite frightened and unhappy?"

"Now it strikes me," said Bertie, laying the first finger of his right hand upon the palm of his left, "that Aunt Eva is happier than Cousin Eleanor. I'm sure that she looks as if she were so, though she is so terribly pale."

"Cousin Eleanor has everything in the world to make her happy," observed Diana, who was disposed to regard the lady with something approaching to envy. "She has nothing to do but to amuse herself from morning till night; she is rich enough to buy all that she fancies; she has long ago got over all the trouble of lessons, and every one praises her music and drawing, and thinks her so handsome besides! Then how splendidly Eleanor dresses, and what a lot of jewels she wears! If I had all that she has, I should be as happy as a queen!"

"But have you not noticed," said Bertie, who was a more close observer than his sister, "that Eleanor never has the bright look of Aunt Eva; that she often has a discontented air, as if she were tired of everything, and

thought nobody worth caring for? She makes me think of that odd story which Mr. Gray told us, of the poor fellow—I forget his long name, who stood in a river where the water was up to his neck, so that it seemed as if he could drink to his heart's content; but, though he was ready to die of thirst, whenever he stooped to drink, down went the water just out of his reach! It would be worse to be thirsty surrounded by water than if not a drop were to be seen; it would be worse to be dull in the midst of pleasures, than when there seemed to be some reason for dulness!"

"You're the oddest boy that ever I knew!" laughed Diana, "I only say that I should like to stand in Cousin Eleanor's shoes, I'm sure that I should be merry enough! Do you think that she knows Aunt Eva?"

"Oh, she has often heard about her, I fancy; but cousin Eleanor would not condescend to *know* any one who lives in a cottage no bigger than the lodge of Aspen Hall."

"Aunt Eva is just as much a lady as she is," said Diana.

"A good bit more, I should say," observed

Bertie, "if politeness is the sign of a lady; for Aunt Eva is courteous to every one, and Cousin Eleanor is only polite to those whom she happens to fancy. I often think, I do, that I should like to see her pride brought down, and that of her big bullying brother besides."

"Aunt Eva would call you very naughty for saying so."

"Oh, she's not given to scolding!" cried Bertie, "though somehow or other her quiet gentle words stick in one's mind; they have given my conscience many a twinge! I wonder how it is," added the boy, "that some people have a knack of looking right into one's heart, and finding out all that one is thinking?"

"I wish that you would leave off your wondering, and help me over this stile," said Diana. "Stenie has stalked on half a mile before us."

"You'd have got over the stile without my help," observed Bertie, "if you had not taken to squeezing in your waist like a wasp, and puffing out your dress like a balloon, in imitation, I suppose, of Miss Waters! I'm afraid

you'll be getting quite a fine lady, and I like you much better as you are!" added Bertie, as after swinging himself over the stile, he offered his hand to his sister.

"What nonsense you talk!" exclaimed Diana.

"Mind, or I'il pull you over!" cried the merry boy; "you're at my mercy at the top of the stile, for I could land you in the blackberry bramble, or plump you down into the ditch! But I'll be magnanimous for once; and you shall not wet your kid boots, or leave half a yard of your dainty lace-trimming to flutter on the prickles!"

Diana jumped lightly to the ground. "What a pretty view we have of aunt's cottage," she observed, as she turned into the shady lane that led to the dwelling.

"It's a beauty of a cottage!" cried Bertie. "To my mind thatch is much prettier than slates, a porch than a grand pillared portico, and I'm sure that yon creeper, with its bright red leaves, looks finer than anything that grows by the hall."

"That red colour tells of fading," said Diana; "I don't like to see it, for it re-

minds one that winter, dark, dull winter is coming."

"How strange it is," observed Bertie, "that the trees never look so beautiful as when the leaves are going to die! Just see that elm, —one would think that some fairy had turned that large branch into gold! Perhaps it is with some people, just as with the leaves, their last hours are their brightest and best!"

"I wish you would not speak so!" said Diana; "I can't bear that kind of talk, for it makes me think of Aunt Eva."

"Here we are at the porch!" cried Bertie, "no need of knocking or ringing! Some one sees us through the pretty little window, I hear the tingle of Aunt Eva's bell; and here comes Sarah with the hissing brown urn! There's nothing like a walk across the fields to give one an appetite for breakfast!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SILVER CASKET.

IN a small but prettily-furnished apartment, lay an invalid on a sofa. The light through the latticed window overhung with clematis, fell on her soft and delicate features; and the hand, almost white as marble, which held a letter, written on foreign paper, and bearing a Chinese post-mark. We will glance over the lady's shoulder, and read a part of this letter on which her eyes are fixed with a thoughtful and rather anxious expression.

"I need hardly tell you, my Eva," so wrote Mrs. Vane, "that I feel uneasy at the idea of my children passing any considerable time at Aspen Hall. I fear the influence of the society of those whose views and habits are so different from our own; but my dear husband was unwilling to hurt his cousin by declining her

proffered kindness, and we are both glad that our dear ones should enjoy a little change of air and scene in the country. But what most reconciles my mind to the visit to Aspen Hall, is the knowledge that our three will be near to you, and can often be at your cottage. I place the fullest trust in your kindness, and I believe that by your counsel and example our children will be guarded from the worldly temptations which might otherwise prove dangerous to them."

Eva sighed as she laid down the letter, and pressed her slender fingers over her brow. "What can I do?" she sadly reflected, "dear Sophy little knew that this would find me a poor helpless—perhaps dying invalid. I have no longer energy to act, nor strength to throw myself, as I once would have done, into the occupations and amusements of the young. I have done what I could, but that is little. Every morning the dear ones share my early meal, and I am thankful that the late hours kept at the hall secure me this daily visit. But how little can I offer my sister's family, except my love and my prayers! I have to struggle against a sense of weakness which

takes from me much of the pleasure which I should have felt in seeing her offspring around me. Weak spirits, throbbing nerves, the languor against which I vainly strive, make that too often a burden which would otherwise be a delight. I have such a longing for stillness and rest. But should I not rather rejoice if, even in my weakness, my heavenly Father give me some little work to do! He can, and surely He will bless the feeblest effort to serve Him. The children are very dear to my heart, and I feel that—at least by the two younger, my love is warmly returned. Diana is a sweet, gentle girl, almost too anxious to please, for I fear that her character may take the mould of any society into which she may be thrown. The desire for praise, the wish to give pleasure, which make her a delightful companion, may—in her present situation—prove to her only a snare. Against this snare may I not warn her? My brave Bertie, candid and generous, and thoughtful beyond his years; his mind seems to me like a rich soil which promises a plentiful harvest, but in which weeds too readily grow. May I not drop in some little seed which the bless-

ing of God may ripen? And Stenie, my Sophy's first-born, he whose birth caused us all such delight, shall I not speak to him some loving word, which may, perhaps, be remembered when these lips lie cold in the grave? Oh, that I had the power, as I have the will, to bless those three beloved ones! and will not He, who has given the will, grant to me also the power?"

Even as these thoughts were passing through the mind of Eva, Stenie Vane entered the cottage. He was a tall slender lad, with high features, light eyes, and rather a sallow complexion. He was at that age when the youth often tries to assume the manners of the man, is tenacious of dignity, and dreads above all things to be mistaken for a boy. With limbs not yet firmly knit together, Stenie seemed scarcely to know what to make of his own height, or how to dispose of his arms, and it was perhaps the attempt to throw off awkward shyness, that gave him an air of roughness. Eva's observant eye noticed various trifles which, of no consequence in themselves, often serve as an index to character. The gay neck-tie with its fanciful pin, the showy

watch-chain, the large signet-ring, the scent left on the clothes by smoking, the little affectation of manner which might with some have provoked a smile, were all signs to Eva of a gradual change which she did not think a change for the better. Stenie shook hands with his aunt, and asked after her health, but his tone was not that of affectionate interest.

"I hope that you do not come alone?" said Eva, ringing the bell for breakfast, as Stenie threw himself down on the only arm-chair in the room, and began biting the ivory head of his cane for lack of other occupation.

"Di and the young cub are just behind me," began Stephen, when Bertie burst into the room, and running up to the sofa threw his arms with rough affection round the neck of his aunt.

"Oh, mind, Bertie, you'll hurt her!" exclaimed Diana, who followed close on his steps.

"I did not hurt you, did I?" cried Bertie. If the roughness of his salute had raised a flush on his aunt's pale face, its heartiness brought a smile to her lips.

"I'm such a donkey—I'm always forgetting that I must not be boisterous with you!" cried

Bertie, "and you're not looking at all well to-day! How I wish that you were able to get off that sofa, and go black-berrying with us as you did last year when papa and mamma were at home! It must be so dull to lie there day after day!"

"You come to cheer me," said Eva gaily. "There are some things that gladden the heart quite as much as the sunshine."

"A good breakfast is one of them," cried Bertie, as he seated himself at the table with every inclination to do full justice to the rolls and butter, while Diana, with juvenile pride, took upon herself the honour of the tea-making.

The meal-time passed pleasantly enough. Eva read aloud portions of the letter received that morning from China, omitting of course any part that related to temptations at Aspen Hall. The Vanes chatted over with her all the little events that interested themselves; Eva was a kind and attentive listener, and if the loud merry voices in that little room were distressing to her head, she kept her feelings to herself, and tried not to show, even by a look, that the sound was too great for her comfort. When breakfast was concluded,

Stenie took his drawing-block and seated himself at the window, and Diana took out some crochet from a little bag. Eva's delicate hands were employed in fine knitting; Bertie alone remained in the uncomfortable position of having nothing to do.

"Have you anything to show me, Aunt Eva?"

"Would you like to look over my ferns?"

"Oh! I'm sick to death of the ferns, and the album, and the book full of pictures of star-fish and jelly-fish. Have you not something new? Something like that puzzle that amused me so much, the silver box that it was so hard to open, I mean till you found out the knack, and in which you saw, when you opened it at last, a little round looking-glass to show you your own face?"

"I have no other such mysterious little casket," replied Eva, whose earthly possessions were but few; "unless," she added, as a thought occurred to her, "unless you would like me to make one for you now."

"Make a silver puzzle with a looking-glass in it, I don't see how you could do that!" cried Bertie.

"I meant an allegory, dear boy, a story with a hidden meaning in it which you will have to puzzle out, as you did the secret of the casket."

"I should like a story above all things," cried Bertie.

"And so should I," echoed his sister, edging her chair closer to the sofa.

"And if you discover the full meaning of my tale, perhaps you will both find that, like the casket, it contains a mirror, in which you may see yourselves."

"Are you going to tell us a story about ourselves?" asked Diana, whose curiosity was excited by the idea.

"It will be a story which will picture the lives of so many thousands of people, that in it you may perhaps trace out your own."

"Do you mean the lives of old people as well as young?" inquired Bertie.

"My little allegory being a history of the hidden life of the soul, belongs both to the aged and the youthful, for the soul grows not old like the body."

"I hope that this curious story of yours will be a good long one," said Bertie; "I don't

like those short tales that come to an end just as you begin to know something of their heroes. But perhaps a long story would tire you, dear aunt?" he added, fixing his eyes with affectionate concern upon the pale wasted countenance before him.

"We may take it, like a long journey, stage by stage, a little portion at a time," replied the lady.

"Ah! that will be best," cried Diana, "and then we can chat over the story, and if we can't just make out its meaning, you will help us, Aunt Eva, to open the casket, and find out the mirror inside."

Eva smiled kindly on the gentle girl, and on Bertie, who, eager for amusement, threw himself on the floor, rested his elbow on the sofa, and his cheek on his hand, so that he could look up into his aunt's face, and watch every movement of her lips. Stephen remained seated at the window, busy with his pencil and block. Eva could not tell by his manner whether he were listening or not, as without any further preface, she began her little allegory.

CHAPTER III.

THE PALACE OF DECEITS.

IN the Palace of Deceits dwelt twin brothers; Seele and Irrend were their names. A goodly palace it was to the eye, adorned, by its wealthy possessor with all that could charm the senses, and built in the centre of a forest so vast and so thick, that many believed it to be impossible to find a way out of its depths. But who that dwelt in the Palace of Deceits would be likely to wish to leave it? The stately walls appeared to be of the whitest marble, the staircase of fine polished oak; the windows were filled with coloured glass, like jewels set in silver, and when the light streamed through them, they cast rainbow tints around. Opposite to the windows were hung pictures in gilded frames depicting various scenes in life. On one appeared a table heaped with every deli-

cacy, meat, game, preserves, and fruit; round it sat a merry party showing by their smiles and eager looks how much they enjoyed the plentiful fare set before them. The next picture portrayed a youthful pair, dressed in gorgeous attire, their robes stiff with gold, and glittering with jewels. Everything around them told of luxury and splendour. Porcelain vases, velvet hangings, statues, paintings, ornaments, all that money could buy. In a third picture was seen a youth, crowned with vine-leaves, and quaffing rosy wine. Often Seele and Irrend gazed at these pictures, and agreed that Self-indulgence, the artist who had painted them all, could be excelled by none in the world. It was he who had been employed to decorate the Palace of Deceits; the twins loved to watch him at his work, for everything that he did appeared to them to be full of brightness and beauty. Under the care of Self-indulgence, quantities of splendid flowers and of bushes laden with fruits, flourished in little parterres in the centre of marble courts. Amongst these flowers and these fruits, humming-birds, like winged blossoms, darted merrily in and out. The chief ornament of

the place was the glittering Fountain of Pleasure, which threw up scented waters from a beautiful urn of gold.

Seele and Irrend, hand in hand, often wandered through the lofty halls, along the terraces, up the broad staircase, through all the gorgeous apartments. They had nothing to do but to amuse themselves, nothing to think of but enjoyment; their lives were like the lives of the birds, and they dreamed of no danger lurking in the Forest of Temptations, no evil in the Palace of Deceits. Little guessed the two thoughtless boys why they had been placed in that dwelling, who had imprisoned them in the palace, and to what a fate they were doomed when their short enjoyments should be over. The twins were captives, though they did not know it, of a cruel and powerful tyrant; and were reserved as victims to be one day sacrificed to his great idol. All the allurements of the Palace of Deceits were but to keep them within its fatal walls, till the time should arrive appointed for their destruction by merciless Sin.

But a day at length arrived on which the intended victims were to receive warning of their danger. One morning in spring, as Seele

and Irrend reclined near the marble basin which enclosed the Fountain of Pleasure, they were surprised by the sight of a beautiful stranger approaching towards them. Her form was fairer than the forms of earth.

> "Brighter the wreath of stars she bore,
> Than those that in night's circlet glow;
> Beside the spotless robe she wore
> Dim were the diamond, dark the snow."

The tone of her voice and the glance of her eye were even as those of an angel. Never had the twins before beheld such a being treading the courts of Deceit.

"I have found you at last. Oh! dear lost ones!" she exclaimed, "I have found you in time to save you! You can yet fly from this fatal place, fly to the home of a Father who has sent me to bring you back to his care!"

"Who art thou, beautiful stranger, and whence dost thou come?" cried Seele.

"My name is Faith," replied the stranger, "and I come from the Bright Land to which I call you now."

"I care not to leave this palace, it is bright enough for me," said Irrend; "I have everything to make me happy, and am quite content to stay here."

"And how can we know," added Seele, "that thou dost really come from our Father, or that if we could make our way through the forest, we should ever reach the Bright Land beyond?"

Faith drew from her bosom a letter, the sign of a cross was on the seal.

"This is from your Father himself," she said, "it bears his message, and it shows my warrant, for in it he speaks of me. But that you may be certain that it is his indeed, let me, ere you read it, anoint your eyes with the salve of knowledge. This will show you things as they really are, and make you see, without the shadow of a doubt, the truth of all that is written in that scroll."

So saying, Faith gently touched the eyelids of each of the twins, and as they looked on her they beheld her more glorious and fair than she had appeared at the first. Then they read the letter from their Father, and saw that every word in it was truth; and much Seele and Irrend wondered at the tidings contained in that scroll.

They found by it that they were in the power of the barbarous tyrant, Sin, who was

wont to lure into his palace many an unsuspecting wanderer. First he promised them many delights, and bade his three servants, Self-indulgence, Covetousness, and Pride, minister to their comforts, and secure to them every joy. But these servants in truth were his spies, placed to watch over his captives, and gradually gain such power over them, that they should never escape from his hands. No thoughts of mercy had Sin even towards those whom he seemed most to favour. First he treated them as guests, then he made them his slaves, and lastly he slew them as victims! No one who remained in the Palace of Deceits but was sacrificed in the end; there was no safety but in flight. In the scroll the twins read what fate was reserved by the tyrant for themselves. They might sport in idle pleasures for a time, but would soon feel his cruel yoke, and, should they remain in his power, would perish at last by his hand."

"Oh, Faith!" exclaimed Seele, "what shall we do?"

"There is a way of escape," replied Faith; "one door which even the tyrant has now no power to shut, one path through the

Forest of Temptations which even he cannot close."

"But," said Irrend with a hesitating air, "we are yet but young, and we are not prepared for a difficult, dangerous journey. Let us stay for awhile where we are, there is plenty of time before us; we may enjoy ourselves yet a little longer in this beautiful Palace of Deceits."

"Lift up your eyes," said Faith gravely, "now that they are anointed with knowledge, and see if Sin's gorgeous palace has not lost some part of its splendour."

"How strange!" exclaimed Seele in surprise, "I thought that the waters of the Fountain of Pleasure before us sparkled like diamonds, now they seem to me muddy and impure!"

Irrend gazed wonderingly on a flower-bed near. "Can it be," he exclaimed, "that not one of these blossoms are real! There is no life in the roses, and as for the fruits they are wax!"

"And the walls are but painted!" cried Seele, "how could we ever be so deceived as to think them marble!"

"What we took for gold is but gilding, yet it still looks splendid!" said Irrend.

"These are not humming-birds but wasps!" cried Seele, shrinking back as one of them buzzed by his ears. "Oh, how strangely have our eyes been blinded while we dwelt in the Palace of Deceits!"

"The colours in the windows appear to be beginning to fade!" exclaimed Irrend.

"Gradually they will fade more and more," said Faith, "till at length a dimness and finally a darkness will gather over each pane, to end in the blackness of night! But now turn your eyes to the pictures painted by Self-indulgence, which have shown you in such bright hues Gluttony, Extravagance, and Intemperance. Look at the jovial party now, assembled at their proud feast."

Seele and Irrend looked, and like a dissolving view the scene was gradually changed. An hospital appeared, crowded with suffering forms. The pleasures of Gluttony had changed to the pains and penalties it brings! There was sickness where there had been pleasure, instead of the laugh was the moan!

"See the second picture!" cried Irrend.

In it the once wealthy pair again appeared, but not in the dwelling where they had stood in their pomp and pride. There were no more purple hangings, jewelled ornaments, or vessels of gold to be seen. Extravagance had done its work! Two miserable, discontented beings sat together in a dark, ill-furnished room, who seemed by the louring expression on their faces to be bitterly reproaching each other for the ruin in which each had an equal share.

The third picture was sadder still. He who had gaily quaffed the wine cup, appeared lying in the dust, a miserable spectacle of shame! Two stern ministers of justice stood beside him, with handcuffs, about to drag him off to prison for some crime committed when Intemperance had maddened his brain!

"Oh," exclaimed Seele, "let us leave at once and for ever this Palace of Sin, where nothing is really what it seems, where all is mere outside show, and where danger lurks under delights!"

"We can never find our way through the forest," said Irrend; "where are we to look for a guide?"

"The scroll which I have brought gives full directions for your flight," replied Faith, "and there is another powerful help for your weakness. When you were stolen from your Father, each of you bore, hung round your neck, a little cup of pure gold, which may be neglected, put aside, tarnished, but which by a mysterious law can never be quite lost or destroyed! This golden cup is called Conscience, and doubtless you each have it still."

"Mine is in my bosom," said Irrend.

"And here," joined in Seele, "is mine."

"Rub them bright, keep them clear," cried Faith, "for a wondrous power lies in Conscience when it is filled with grace."

"What is grace?" asked both twins in a breath.

"It is light in darkness, help in weakness, comfort in sorrow," replied Faith. "It is to be sought and found by prayer. If you are athirst, pray, and grace will be water in your cup; if you are in sickness, pray, and grace will be medicine therein: if you are in darkness, pray, and conscience will be filled with the light of grace. There is no trouble or grief which can befall you, which grace will

not enable you to bear; there is no temptation which can assail you, which grace cannot help you to overcome!"

Irrend looked with wonder at his cup. "I have often wished to throw this away," he cried; "it felt heavy and burdensome to me. I never deemed that its value was so great."

"And I have often longed to be able to cast away mine," observed Seele; "but it seems like a part of myself. Sometimes in the midst of my pleasures, I have felt conscience like a heavy and burning weight on my heart!"

"It will burn—it will wound," replied Faith, "one of its most valuable uses is this, for thus it warns against Sin. Whenever conscience presses as a weight, be sure that danger is near; whenever it burns where it lies, be on your guard, for you are in peril of falling into the power of Sin!"

"I marvel," cried Seele, "to find that since you have been with us, O Faith, and since we have read the letter from our Father, conscience has grown as light as the plumes on the wing of a dove!"

"Prize it, watch it, pray over it," said Faith. "Never neglect its warnings. With grace in the conscience and love in the heart, safe and uninjured may you pass through the thickest maze of the Forest of Temptations. Rise now, my children, and flee, while Self-indulgence, Covetousness, and Pride, appear awhile to be absent. Soon will they track your footsteps, and though they have no power to use force, every art will they try to persuade you to return. Listen not—delay not—never turn back. Behold there the one open door; blessed, thrice blessed are they who through it escape the destroyer!"

Even as she spake the words, Faith melted from the sight of the brothers; but a secret feeling told them that her presence was with them still.

"O brother, let us obey,—let us fly at once!" cried Seele.

"I will but drink a little from the fountain," replied Irrend, "to refresh myself for the journey."

"Nay, the waters are not pure," said Seele, "do not taste them lest they harm you."

"I have tasted them often and received no

hurt!" cried Irrend, stooping down by the fountain to drink.

Seele remembered the words of Faith. He, too, needed refreshment, he felt thirst like his brother, but he took other means of quenching it. While Irrend drank from the fountain of pleasure, Seele fell on his knees and prayed. As he prayed, his golden cup gradually became filled with the purest water, and when he drained it, new life and vigour seemed to come from the draught.

"Are you ready, my brother?" he cried.

"Nay," replied Irrend, with a weary sigh, "I see no reason for so much haste. We can go whenever we will, and I am not prepared for a journey."

"Faith bade us fly at once!" exclaimed Seele. "What if, while we linger here, Pride or Covetousness should come and hold us back altogether? What if the door should be shut? What if to-night should be the very night on which we are appointed to be sacrificed by him of whom we sometimes have heard, the executioner Death?"

"Will you set out now?" asked Irrend.

"I will set out at once," replied Seele.

"Nay, then I will go with you," said his brother. "A path is always more pleasant if two travel on it together."

So Seele and Irrend arose, each with his golden cup in his bosom, and Seele carefully bearing his Father's scroll in his hand.

"I think," observed Irrend, ere they crossed the hall, "that our best and easiest way will be by yonder window, which opens upon a fine broad path, which will, doubtless, take us through the forest."

"Faith told us of but one door and one path," said Seele; "and see, in our Father's letter, it is written that the way is narrow. O Irrend, if we once set out in a wrong direction, every step may but take us further from the Bright Land, further from the home that we seek."

"Lead on then," replied Irrend; "we will both go where Faith pointed out the way."

Thus, hand in hand, the twins set forth from the Palace of Deceits. What befell them on their journey through the Forest of Temptations we may hear on some future day.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLESSING TO BE SOUGHT.

"WELL, Aunt Eva," exclaimed Bertie, as the invalid paused, "I think that your story is full of puzzles, and I do not know when I shall get at the looking-glass which is to show me myself. First of all, what is the Palace of Deceits?"

"I know what aunty means by it," said Diana with a satisfied smile at her own penetration.

"What may that be, my love?" inquired the lady.

"You mean Aspen Hall, by the Palace of Deceits."

"Oh, no," exclaimed Bertie, "that cannot be! Everything is real enough there, the marble is marble, the pictures can't change, and I can answer for the flowers and the fruit!"

"I do not mean Aspen Hall, or any other *place* by the Palace of Deceits," observed Eva. "I only wished to describe the *state* in which we are all by nature. We are all naturally under the slavery of sin, we are all disposed to think that happiness can be found in selfish indulgence. If we have all that this world can give, the young especially are inclined to believe that nothing else is required. They sport beside the Fountain of Pleasure, and do not see that its waters are impure."

"But not all pleasures are wicked!" cried Bertie.

"By no means," said Eva with earnestness; "the gracious God who has loaded us with blessings, intends that we should enjoy them; but we must enjoy them looking unto Him, being thankful to Him, receiving them all as from Him. Seele and Irrend in the Palace of Deceits, before the voice of Faith was heard, represent those who, forgetful of God, think only of pleasing themselves. They fancy that the world is all brightness,—they take the gilding for gold."

"And if Faith had not given them the salve of knowledge," asked Bertie, "would

they have ever found out the world's pleasures to be false ones?"

"Yes," replied Eva, "they would have found out their emptiness at last, time would have given them that knowledge. Thousands and thousands who have lived but for themselves, and who have never listened to Faith, have discovered that there is no lasting enjoyment in Sin's Palace of Deceits, nay, that its pleasures often bear a sting, like the wasps in my story. It is not only in the Bible that we learn that *vanity of vanities* is stamped upon everything that has not God's blessing upon it."

"Ah! did not the letter from the Father mean the Bible?" inquired Diana.

"It did so," replied her aunt.

"I thought so," said Bertie; "and the Bright Land is Heaven;—we must go to it through the Forest of Temptations. That is easy enough to understand; and so is the golden cup of conscience, which we carry about in our bosoms, for I have often felt mine grow heavy and uncomfortable when I was doing something that was wrong. But what Faith said about the cup being filled with grace, I do not understand in the least."

"Grace means God's favour, or, as I describe it, *God's help*. We are so weak and sinful in ourselves, so much inclined to wander from the right way, or to be found faint-hearted when in it, that, but for God's help, asked by prayer, even the grace of the Holy Spirit, we could not pass safely through temptations, nor ever reach the home of our Father."

"Now it seems to me," said Bertie, "that if conscience showed me what was right, and I quite made up my mind to do it, I should need nothing but my own strong will, and would walk steadily and boldly straight forward, whoever might try to stop me!"

Eva read determination in the bright young face before her, and yet she shook her head. "You do not know your own weakness," she said, "nor how deep and thick is the Forest of Temptations. Sin will never readily let one of his captives escape. St. John warns us against the world's three servants, *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*, which we may describe as Self-indulgence, Covetousness, and Pride. These will seek, by every art, to draw us back to the Palace of Deceits."

Diana had scarcely listened to the last observation, she was so anxious to put in a question of her own. "Aunt, aunt," she said, laying her small hand upon that of Eva, "will you explain just one thing? Why did you say that the tyrant first made slaves of poor people, and afterwards had them killed? I know that some bad, *very* bad men are hanged, and that some have dreadful accidents when they have been drinking too much; but very few really *die* because they are servants of sin."

"Do you not remember the text, *The wages of sin is death*," cried Bertie, eager to show his knowledge.

"That is just what I don't understand."

"Because," said Eva, "my Diana does not see that the death here mentioned is the death of the *soul*, which is endless banishment from heaven, endless separation from God. To the believer what we call death is only a change from life here, to better life above; there is no *real* death but to those who remain the servants of sin."

"You mean those who are *very* bad," said Bertie, with a perplexed look upon his face; "thieves, and murderers, and the like."

"I mean all those who through life *forget God*, and never come to the Saviour for pardon."

"Now," exclaimed Bertie, almost with impatience, "that is just how Mrs. Gray speaks, and I can never make out what she means! She says that we are all miserable sinners. I do not think that I am one, and I am quite certain that you are not, neither is papa or mamma. She tells us that we have broken God's laws;—I don't see what law we have broken. None of us have worshipped images, or killed, or stolen."

"Ah, but Bertie," interrupted Diana, gently touching his arm, "you know—last Sunday—" she did not complete the sentence, for her brother recalled at once what had happened.

"Oh, nobody is always on their guard!" cried Bertie; "but God does not notice such little things as that."

"Can you give me any proof from the Bible that God does not notice little things?" asked Eva de Vere.

Bertie rubbed his forehead with a thoughtful air. "I do not know the Bible well enough," he murmured at last.

"Ah, my boy, the better you know the Bible the more clearly will you see that God notices and judges the words of the lips, nay, the very thoughts of the heart! You do not see what law you have broken. Have you kept (to mention but *one*), the first and great commandment? *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength.*"

Bertie was by far too honest and candid to think that he had ever done this, but still his neglect of this duty did not seem to weigh on his conscience. "I should think," he observed, "that it is enough if we *obey*, without *loving* so much."

"I might pause on that word *if*," said Eva, "and soon convince you that in many, many things we do not obey our heavenly Father. But even were our obedience quite perfect, it would be of little worth if it sprang not from the motive of love."

Bertie did not look by any means convinced.

"Suppose," said Eva, "that you were to obey your mother in all things, that you did whatever she bade you do, because you feared

greatly that she would punish you were you to neglect to do so, or you thought that your obedience would bring you a large reward; suppose that all the while you did not love her at all, that you preferred any society to hers, that you never thought of her when you could help it, would your mother be satisfied with you, could you call yourself a good son?"

"I should be worse than a dog!" exclaimed Bertie; "I never could treat such a mother in so ungrateful a way!"

"And will our heavenly Father be satisfied with cold, careless, imperfect obedience, caused not by *love* but by *fear*, or the hope of *reward?* His word is, *My son, give me thy heart;* and he will be content with no less."

"But it does not seem to me," said Bertie after a pause, "that we *can* love God with all our hearts just because we know that it is our duty to do so."

"No, we need God's *grace* to enable us to do so," said Eva de Vere. "It is by his Spirit alone that *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.*"

"There is one more thing that I do so want to ask you," said Diana, "why did Faith

say that there was but *one* door, and *one* path by which the two prisoners could escape from the power of sin?"

"Because in these words I would try to shadow forth the great central truths of the gospel. Men fancy that there are many ways to heaven; the Bible tells us of but *one*. Men would choose paths for themselves; there is but one path that leadeth unto life."

"That is the path of goodness," said Diana.

"Not our own goodness, my dear child; were we to depend upon that, never never could the best of us ever reach heaven! The Bible tells us that the way to be saved is to *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*. He died that we might live; He took upon Himself the punishment of our sins, that we might receive the reward of His goodness. Through faith, that is belief in the Saviour, we have forgiveness, and peace, and life eternal."

"But if we are saved only because we *believe*," observed Bertie, "it does not seem to matter what we *do*."

"If you *believed*, dear Bertie, that a friend had watched over you and cared for you from your birth, had loved you with a love even

greater than that of your mother; that, when you were in danger of death, he had saved you by dying in your stead, what would be your feelings toward such a friend?"

"I should love him with all my heart!" exclaimed Bertie.

"And how would you feel towards the enemies who had caused his cruel death?" inquired Eva.

"I would hate them, and kill them if I could!" cried the boy.

"Then if you *believe* from your soul that the Lord Jesus has suffered and died for you, you will love Him with all your heart," said the lady; "you will hate sin because it is His enemy, and try to slay it in yourself. And if," continued Eva, "your friend had left you some dying request, had asked you to do something for his sake—"

"I'd do it, whatever it cost me!" exclaimed Bertie.

"And can those who truly *believe,* ever forget the dying injunction of the Saviour, *If ye love me, keep my commandments?*"

There was silence for several moments, and then Diana in a soft tone said, "I think that

religion is all love from beginning to end. First, love in the Lord in dying for us, then love in us to Him for his goodness, and last of all love to one another for the sake of the blessed Saviour."

Eva looked on the little girl with one of her brightest smiles. "*God is love,*" she replied, "and *we love Him because He first loved us.* It is our faith that leads us to love, and our love that leads us to obedience."

"But it seems to me," said Bertie, in his simple blunt way, "that it is just this faith and this love that do not come natural at all. I'm afraid that you'll think me very bad, Aunt Eva, but it is easier to me to do right in hopes of getting to heaven by goodness, than it is to do right just for love of a great, holy Friend whom I never have seen! It seems hard to think myself nothing, and yet be always fighting against sin!"

"It is difficult, my boy," replied Eva, "so difficult that nothing but God's grace can give us that faith and love."

"I never thought about grace at all till to-day," said Bertie, "and when I heard the word I did not know what it meant; but

it seems, by what you say, to be what none of us can get to heaven without. We can't pass through temptations safely without it; we cannot really love God without it; I suppose that we cannot even know what we ourselves are without it."

"Grace teaches us to be lowly as well as loving," replied Eva.

"But how are we to have grace?" asked Diana.

"The Lord Jesus Christ hath promised, *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.* He has pledged his word that the grace of the Holy Spirit will be given in answer to prayer."

Stephen rose from the window at which he had been seated, apparently paying little or no attention to the conversation. A discontented expression was on his face. "I can make nothing of this drawing!" he exclaimed, "I am not in a mood for it this morning. I am going home to the Hall at once." He nodded a good-bye to his aunt, and leaving his brother and sister to follow at their leisure, quitted Mayflower Cottage.

CHAPTER V.

THE COTTAGE AND THE HALL.

"I WONDER, Di, why Stenie went off in such a hurry," said Bertie to his sister, as they sauntered together on their homeward way.

"He did not like what Aunt Eva was saying."

"I don't think he attended to one word."

"He did though," said Diana significantly. "I just gave a look at him now and then, and I saw him turn down the corners of his mouth. I was glad that poor aunt could not see it! Perhaps Stenie was wondering what Cousin Eleanor and Warren would say if they heard about faith, and love, and grace!"

"Isn't it odd, Di," observed Bertie, "but I can't fancy that they would understand those things the very least in the world, no more than we should understand a book written in

Hebrew! The Waters seem to me as if they were of a different nature from Aunt Eva."

"What can make such a difference?" said Diana.

"I suppose that the great difference comes from what aunt calls grace," observed Bertie. "All, I suppose, have the golden cup of Conscience, but some let it get quite tarnished and dull, and almost forget that they have it; while others, like our parents and Aunt Eva, are always watching and praying, and the cup is never empty, and they get better and better, and holier and holier, until God takes them to heaven."

"Do you think that Aunt Eva was ever in the Palace of Deceits?" asked Diana.

"I can't tell as to her," said Bertie, "but I think that every soul at Aspen Hall is, and perhaps they have begun to find out that it is but a wretched place after all."

"Do you know, Bertie," observed Diana in a lower tone, "I'm sure that auntie would not approve of your talking as you do about those in whose house we are living. Once when I did so, she looked quite grave, and said, '*Judge not that ye be not judged.*'"

"One can't help noticing what is right before one's eyes," answered Bertie. "If Aunt Eva saw as much of the ways of the Hall as we do, I've a notion that she would judge too."

"Aunt Eva has such a spirit of love, she is so ready to find excuses for others, and then she thinks so little of herself, that she never judges any one hardly."

"She must always have been an angel!" exclaimed Bertie.

"No,—would you believe it,—she once told me herself that she was a very passionate child, and vain of her looks besides!"

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Bertie in surprise; "if any one but auntie had said that, I'd have knocked him down for slander! What can have changed her so much?"

"It must have been grace," said Diana, "and it must be grace that makes her so sweet and patient as she lies on that couch in pain."

Bertie walked on some little distance in silence, and then observed, "It must be grace that makes my father such a noble upright man, and my mother the best mother in the

world! They always look to God in everything that they do,—and so they walk on straight through the Forest of Temptations without turning to the right or the left."

"I wish that we were like them," said Diana.

"We may be, I should think," observed her brother. "If we ask heartily for grace we shall have it,—we know that it is God's gift, and He has promised it to those who really seek it. I'll ask for it in my prayers this very night."

"Suppose we pray together," said Diana; "we could meet in the little study that is at the end of the passage."

"But what if Lady Waters, or Warren, or any one else, should come in?"

"We could choose their dining hour," replied Diana. "Then we should be quite safe."

"And even if any one *did* come in, we should have nothing to be ashamed of," said Bertie. "I think that it would be a very good plan if you and I prayed sometimes together, to keep each other steady to the habit. I quite forgot my prayers last night; there's

nothing at Aspen Hall to remind me of anything holy."

The children had now reached a little thatched cottage at the end of a field, with a very small slip of garden before it, in which a few potatoes were raised, while one tiny plot was gay with yellow marigolds.

"That is the cottage of good old Betty Miller, who nursed dear mamma in an illness when I was a baby," said Diana, stopping before the little wooden fence. "I always like to see her, she is so cheerful and nice."

"If I were she, I would rear something better in my garden than those ugly potatoes and marigolds," said Bertie.

The old woman had caught sight of the young people, and hobbled out of her door, with a look of pleasure on her honest, wrinkled face. She was small, and lame, and her dress, though neat, was patched in half-a-dozen places.

"You be looking at them pretty flowers, my dear?" she said to Diana in a cheerful tone of voice; "you be heartily welcome to some of 'em," and stooping down she began to pluck her marigolds with the energy of good will.

Diana saw from the twinkle in her young brother's eye that he was inclined to burst out laughing. She was amused herself at the old woman's idea of a nosegay; but that politeness which is truly said to be "good-nature refined," made Diana Vane accept the marigolds with as pleasant a smile as if they had been roses or camelias.

"You've a nice little cottage," she observed.

"Thank God for such a home!" replied the old woman, looking with pleasure at her humble abode; "and thanks to your dear, kind mamma, who pays my rent every year."

"But it must be cold in the winter," said Diana.

"O Miss de Vere!—bless her, she sends me some coals each winter, and a bright fire makes everything cheery! I'm sure I can't be grateful enough for having been given such friends."

"Can you get to church?" asked Bertie.

"Sometimes when the sun shines warm and bright, I can just hobble so far," said Betty; "and these are joyful Sabbaths to me. But my rheumatis bees often so bad, that I can't get out of the cottage."

"Then you read the Bible at home?" said Diana.

"Ah, dear young miss, these poor old eyes be a'ginning to fail me,—I can't make out the letters on the page." The cheerful face was shaded for a moment with a look of sadness, which almost instantly passed away as she added, "But you see, miss, I know a deal by heart, and as I sits by the fire I think on't, and it makes me feel so cheery."

"Have you no one to live with you?" inquired Bertie.

"No one biding in the cottage with me here; but I see my son, or my dear little grand-child, well-nigh every day," replied Betty.

"Do you not often feel lonely and dull?"

"O miss, if God be with us, it would be a sin and a shame to feel lonely. There be pleasant thoughts to keep one company. Sometimes I think of the times that are gone, and I can say, from the bottom of my heart, 'Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life;' and then I look on to the gladder times that be a-coming,—God keeps His best things for the last."

Bidding old Betty a kindly good-bye, Diana and her brother went on their way.

"Now," observed Bertie, "some people would say that yonder old woman has everything in the world to make her unhappy. She is old, lonely, and poor, lame with that horrid rheumatism, and getting so blind that she cannot even have the comfort of reading her Bible. And yet she is not unhappy; she is quite contented and cheerful. I suppose that her kind of pleasures are real solid gold, that only gets the brighter by rubbing,—instead of wearing away, like mere gilding."

"I should think," said Diana, "that good old Betty's cup has been filled with grace. You know Faith told the twins that it was 'comfort in sorrow.'"

When the young Vanes reached the garden at the back of Aspen Hall, they found Lady Waters standing by a marble statue, engaged in talking to her head man. The lady's back was turned towards them, but the angry tone of her voice, as well as the cowed, perplexed look on the gardener's face, showed that for some cause or other he had come under her high displeasure.

"Really, keeping three men as I do, I have a right to expect something better from a garden like mine. Mrs. Manners has three new kinds of fuchsia, and all the curious ferns, and her flowers are fit for an exhibition, while I have nothing but trash!" and the lady glanced indignantly over the beds of verbena, argirium, and pelargoniums, which were showing some signs of having suffered from the approach of cold weather.

The gardener muttered something about early frosts, and said that he had taken in some of his plants.

"It was absurd to take them in yet," cried the lady, "and to leave my garden a desert, just when I am expecting company here! I am sure," she continued, turning round so that she faced Diana and Bertie, "there is nothing but worry in this life! I've sent again and again for these desert-plates from Worcester, to make up the set which the Duke of Drayton declared was the finest ever he had seen: and now—when I get them at last—they don't match the rest at all, there's a double rim of gilding round the edge instead of a single!" The lady's brow was furrowed with

care as she burst out with this statement of her misfortunes, apparently to relieve her burdened mind, for she could scarcely be said to address herself to the Vanes.

Lady Waters did not seem to expect any reply, and turned her steps towards the Hall, so that Bertie and Diana were not called upon to express any sympathy that they might feel on account of the flowers or the plates. As soon as the lady, in her rustling silk dress, had mounted the marble steps which led up to her stately mansion, Bertie burst into a merry laugh.

"I must have it out at last!" he exclaimed; "you would not let me laugh when the good old Betty was gathering her nosegay of marigolds."

"It would have hurt her," interrupted Diana.

"But I can't help laughing now when I see how clever some people are in making themselves unhappy. Look at all these lovely beds of flowers that their owner calls *trash*,—but a few days ago they were one sheet of bright blossom, and they are beautiful still. Think of this garden being called a desert! Why, I

do believe that lame Betty has more pleasure and pride in her plot of potatoes and marigolds, than Lady Waters has from this splendid place, which three gardeners keep in such order."

"It makes one think," said Diana, "that perhaps things are more evenly divided in the world than one would fancy."

"I'm glad that you've owned that at last, Miss Di! You seemed to think this morning that if you had only Cousin Eleanor's fine dresses and splendid jewels, you could not fail to be happy. Now let's come into the house, and see what Stenie is about. We may be in time for a second breakfast, you know," added Bertie playfully, nudging his sister's elbow.

A very luxuriant repast appeared on the dining-room table. The silver urn; the exquisite china; the sideboard of richly carved oak, loaded with ham, cold game, and preserved meats; all told of wealth lavishly expended in procuring every indulgence. But what are dainties to those who have not appetite to enjoy them? Warren Waters had just risen from the table, and thrown himself into an easy chair by the window, to read a sporting

magazine. He was a tall well-made man, and would have been handsome, had there not been a coarseness and puffiness about his face caused by habitual excess both in eating and drinking. The fresh bright look of youth was gone, and even the eye of a child might detect in his bloated features the effect of "living to eat," instead of "eating to live." Bertie could not help thinking of the picture in the Palace of Deceits, and it crossed his mind that Betty's son, who was an honest, hard-working ploughman, looked healthier and happier than the pampered young squire of Aspen Hall. Eleanor had also finished her breakfast, and when her cousins entered, was standing near her brother. Her tall, elegant figure was set off to advantage by a rich moire dress, made in the latest fashion; diamonds glittered on her finger, and from her chain hung a dozen fanciful charms, which always attracted the admiration of Diana. Eleanor had less languor than usual in her manner, as she addressed herself to Warren.

"Now, Warren, you must put by that paper, for I've ordered my horse, and I want you to ride over with me to the Camdens."

"I'm not going," replied Warren, gruffly, without raising his eyes from the page.

"But you know that Lightfoot is so restive that I never dare ride him unless a gentleman is with me; and he will be so fresh, for he has been in the stable for a week."

"Let him stay there a week more," growled Warren.

"But really—"

"I won't go to the Camdens, that's enough!"

"But we have seemed quite rude to them," persisted Eleanor; "we are certain to see them at the archery-meeting on Monday, and I shall feel it so awkward, for we should have called a fortnight ago."

"What's that to me?" said Warren, rising, and throwing the magazine down on a chair.

"You will never do anything to please me," observed Eleanor, in a tone of vexation; "I daresay that you are merely going over to Rattray's for one of your endless games of billiards."

"I am not bound to give an account of my whereabouts to you," said Warren. "I've something else to do than to dangle after your heels like a lackey. Ride Lightfoot or let

him alone, it's no odds to me; and as for your friends the Camdens, I'd not care if every one of the lot were hung up by the neck to-morrow!" and with this uncourteous speech on his lips, the young man lounged out of the room.

"Warren grows more of a bear every day," muttered the lady; "he'll be insufferable at last! Ah, so you have come back, Diana." Eleanor nodded her good morning to the Vanes; "just run, like a good child, and tell Vicars, my maid, that I want to speak to her here."

While Diana obeyed the bidding of her cousin, Bertie, at the table, accomplished his design of having a second breakfast, his appetite being almost as keen as if he had not tasted a first one. He was in such good spirits that he ventured to enter into conversation with Eleanor, whose grandeur sometimes inspired the boy with something like awe.

"I say, Cousin Eleanor, are you going to ride Lightfoot to-day?"

"No," replied the lady somewhat tartly.

Bertie occupied himself with a pie for some seconds before he mustered up courage to say,

"Then I wish you would let me have a gallop on him; it would take off his freshness, you know."

Eleanor raised her eyebrows with a look of surprise at so audacious a proposal, and merely muttering, "the boy must be out of his wits," turned and gazed out of the window."

This rebuff kept Bertie silent till the return of Diana with Vicars, Eleanor's maid.

"I do not choose to go out on horse-back to-day," said the lady to her attendant; "so you may put back my riding-habit. I have just received an invitation to an archery meeting on Monday, I wish my new mauve silk with flounces to be ready for the day."

Vicars, a pale, sickly looking young woman, appeared perplexed at the order. "I have not yet cut it out, Miss," she timidly said; "I did not know that it would be required so soon, and—"

"You must make good speed, that is all," said Eleanor.

"But—to-morrow being Sunday"—

"I tell you it must be ready by Monday, before ten; you can manage it, I know, if you

try. I can't bear to have any one about me who is always making difficulties about obeying my orders. Let me hear no more about it," and the lady swept out of the dining-room followed by her attendant.

CHAPTER VI.

WILLING HANDS.

"NOW, if that isn't the tip-top of selfishness!" exclaimed the indignant Bertie. "Eleanor has on at this moment a dress fine enough for a duchess, so stiff it could stand by itself, and yet she must hurry-scurry that poor, pale maid, to have a yet grander one ready by Monday! I daresay now that Vicars will have to sit up all night."

"And work on Sunday too," observed Diana, "for there are to be three flounces, and Eleanor wears her dresses so wide!"

"If I were Vicars I'd not do it!" cried Bertie; "I would not stop another day in the place!"

"Ah! but poor Vicars is anxious to stay; she has been here only a few weeks, and her last lady has gone to Malta, so that if Eleanor

were angry with her, Vicars would find it very hard to get a character or a place. Besides how could she bear the expense of a journey to London, her mother is very poor, and Vicars assists her from her earnings. Lady Waters gives good wages to her servants."

"How do you know all this?" inquired Bertie.

"Vicars talks about it to me when she helps me to dress in the morning; I suppose that she feels it a comfort to tell her troubles to some one, for Lady Waters' maid only speaks French, and as for the housekeeper"—

"One would as soon tell one's troubles to a tomb-stone as to her," laughed Bertie, "she looks just as hard and as cold!"

"Poor Vicars, I like her!" cried Diana, "she is so obliging and gentle! And I pity her from my heart, for she has such a dreadful cough, and sometimes she looks so ill! I wonder if Eleanor ever notices it!"

"I don't think that Eleanor cares for anything or any one but herself."

"But I felt half sorry for her," said Diana, "when Warren spoke to her so roughly. I could not help thinking how miserable any

home would be without love. If you cared as little for me, Bertie, as Warren seems to care for his sister, I don't think all the fine jewels and fine dresses in the world would make me happy!"

Bertie's answer was a hearty kiss.

"Do you believe," asked Diana, "that grace has anything to do with family love?"

Bertie rubbed his forehead. "I think that it must," he replied, "for all the best people whom I know are also the kindest and most affectionate. I suppose that when the heart is quite full of love to God, it can't help overflowing in love to those who are near us."

"And then, *love one another* is a command in the Bible," suggested Diana. "Do you know, Bertie," she added, laying her little hand confidentially on the arm of her brother, "a strange thing has come into my head."

"What may it be?" asked Bertie.

"I'm afraid that you'll laugh if I tell you. I'm thinking that if any one would run up the three great long flounces for poor Vicars, she might manage to get the dress ready, without working on Sunday at all."

"Can't the French maid do it?" asked Bertie.

"I'm sure that she would not," said Diana. "I happen to know that Elise is tremendously busy just now. I was thinking whether I might not run up two of the flounces. I can work very fast when I like it."

"But you don't like it," laughed Bertie.

"I do think sewing very stupid work, and then when it is yard after yard—yard after yard! But I *could* do a good deal as far as time goes, for you know there's a grand dinner-party to-day, and nobody cares to see us except for a little after dinner; we have our tea in the small back study, and plenty of time to ourselves. I could give four—five—six hours to working," added Diana, counting them on her small fingers.

"You give all that time to slaving away like a sempstress, 'work—work—work—till the head begins to swim!' You prick away your poor wee finger to deck out Miss Eleanor in her fashionable finery! I won't hear of such a thing!" exclaimed Bertie.

"It was not for Eleanor's sake that I would do it," said Diana.

"It is not your business, Di, to do servant's work at all. Vicars is paid, and she must set

to it. I should be quite ashamed if my little sister were found out running up flounces to help a maid-servant!"

Diana blushed up to her eyes, and began to think that she had suggested something very improper. She was also secretly glad that there was no need for her to sacrifice her own amusement for so dull an occupation as sewing. When Bertie asked her whether she would like a game of croquet, she cheerfully tripped off with him to the lawn behind the hall.

Diana was soon heart and soul in the game; but Bertie was unusually silent; even when he made his best hits, he did not seem to care for success.

"Why, what are you thinking of, Bertie!" cried Diana, when her brother placed his foot upon the wrong ball.

"I'm thinking that I've been a bad adviser to you, Di. You were going to do something kind and unselfish, and I pulled you back from doing it."

"Oh, if you mean about the sewing, my laziness pulled me back!" cried Diana.

"And so, as if that were not enough, I added my pride to your laziness. You and I

were agreeing that there is nothing to be ashamed of, if any one should find us saying our prayers together, and now it strikes me that after all there is nothing to be ashamed of in helping a poor sickly over-worked maid, even to run up Miss Eleanor's flounces."

"But I am not at all in the humour for it now," cried Diana, shaking back her flaxen ringlets from her face, rosy with the pleasant exercise which she was enjoying so much.

"I fancy that Aunt Eva would say that if anything right is to be done, it does not matter much whether we are in the humour for it or not," observed Bertie.

"Ah, I suppose that you think I am like Irrend, stopping to drink at the Fountain of Pleasure, while you, like Seele, are determined to set out at once on your journey from the Palace of Deceits. I do feel my conscience prick me a little when I think of poor Vicars at her work, work, work—cough, cough, cough all the night, and then perhaps at her needle half through the Sunday! If you could come and sew too, Bertie, I believe I could make up my mind to set to the tiresome work."

"Neither Eleanor nor Vicars would thank me for trying to do so with my clumsy fingers," laughed Bertie; "but if you want company on your journey through the Forest of Temptations, I'll bring an amusing book and read it beside you while you work."

"Oh, that will be capital!" exclaimed Diana, throwing her mallet down on the grass; "you are a dear good brother to help me so on my way, for I'm a lazy, thoughtless, little girl, and though I often and often resolve to do right, I think I would always forget my resolutions, if I had not some one to remind me of them. As I have such a quantity of work to get over, I had better begin it at once. You find the book, Bertie, dear, while I run to Vicars for the silk. We can sit together so cosy and quiet in the study at the end of the passage!"

And there, in that little retreat, sat the brother and sister for hours, Bertie reading or chatting, while the quick fingers of Diana went rapidly on with the work. Both of the Vanes were in high spirits, for they felt that they, like Seele and Irrend, had been making a brave start from the Palace of Deceits. By

the time that the expected guests were assembling in the drawing-room, Diana had finished a whole flounce. She was not a little proud of the feat, especially as Vicars had hesitated about trusting her with the silk, and had seemed very doubtful whether her assistance would be of much use, though greatly obliged by the offer of it.

"No one will say now that I can't work!" exclaimed Diana, holding up on high, with both arms extended, the long strip of silk, so that no part might touch the carpet.

"I should think that you are now tired of working," observed Bertie, giving a little yawn, and stretching himself.

"Oh, dear no, I've got into the spirit of it, and I want to be able to say that I have run sixteen yards—why that's—let me see—*forty-eight* feet in one day!"

Bertie answered Diana's look of pride by a suitable one of amazement, and began to try to reckon in his head how many inches that would be, but gave up the attempt on finding the calculation a little troublesome.

"But, queen of the needle," said Bertie, "you must remember that we are to appear

in the drawing-room after dinner, so you will have to change your dress, and I to brush myself up a bit."

"That can be done in five minutes!" cried Diana, "and the people will be ever so long at their dinner."

"Stenie dines with them, and isn't he proud!" said Bertie. "I don't envy him though; he'll feel like the goose amongst the swans, stuck up between two grand ladies, and not knowing what to say to them."

"Yet I think that I should like to be at the grand dinner," observed Diana, as she folded up her flounce.

"The dinner itself I should like of all things!" cried Bertie; "a jolly good dinner it will be, to judge by the savoury scent that comes up through the kitchen door!"

"Ah, Bertie, you were never one to agree to the proverb that 'enough is as good as a feast!'" cried Diana playfully, as she ran off to carry her finished work to Vicars, and to bring back a new supply.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DINNER-PARTY.

DIANA worked on cheerfully by candle-light, although somewhat tired with doing more in one day than she would usually have done in ten. Bertie laughed and chatted beside her, and made himself very amusing. The children left the door of the study ajar that they might have a peep of the grand ladies and gentlemen, as they marched solemnly two and two together into the dining-room. Stenie, who alone had no lady to hand, awkwardly brought up the rear.

"I guess we'll be merrier than he," said Diana.

"How funny the hum of voices sounds, whenever the servants open the door!" observed Bertie; "one can hear Warren's voice above all; he always talks as if he

thought that every one else was bound to listen. And just hear the rattle of the knives and forks, and the clink and the clatter of the plates, and 'pop' of the bottles of champagne! And we so quiet and comfy here, not but I should like to have some of the jolly dinner," he added, "if I could enjoy it at my ease."

"The servants are just carrying out the fish course," said Diana.

"I'll just go and have a peep at what they're after!" exclaimed Bertie, jumping up and running out of the study.

He returned in a few minutes with a plate of fish in one hand, and a sauce-boat in the other.

"Just look here, Di!" he exclaimed, "I did not go for nothing! It's a fine thing foraging in an enemy's country! Doesn't the turbot look good!" he cried, smacking his lips, as he set down his prize on the table.

"Oh, but Bertie, what would Lady Waters say?"

"She'd not mind it a bit," replied Bertie; "she would not expect us to be contented with weak tea and bread and butter, when fish like this is at hand! If we don't take

pity on it, 'twill be gobbled up by the footmen."

"I daresay that it will," observed Diana, as she laid her work down on her knee, and looked at the white tempting fish; and yet I should have liked to have had regular leave, to have been quite sure."

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Bertie Vane; "just set to it with good will. You won't mind our having only one plate and fork between us, we can't be ceremonious, you know! I'll give you a jolly lot of the lobster-sauce!"

In his eager haste to enjoy the turbot, Bertie had set down the plate so far over the edge of the table, that as he poured in the sauce he upset it, and plate, turbot, and greasy pink sauce were all landed on the knees of Diana!

"Oh, dear, dear! what's to be done!" she exclaimed in helpless alarm.

"What a stupid blockhead I am!" cried Bertie, hitting his own head with his fist, as if to punish it for the awkwardness of which he had been guilty. Then running to the rescue, he snatched up from Diana's knee first

the empty plate, then the smooth slippery fish, all coloured with the sauce that had been spilt over it, and then after picking up as well as he could the small lumps of lobster that remained, he began to attempt by vigorous rubbing with his handkerchief to remove the stains that were left.

"Oh, the silk!—the silk flounce!" exclaimed poor Diana, ready to burst into tears with vexation.

"I'll run for water—we'll get it all right—pluck up a brave heart; there's no use in crying!" exclaimed Bertie, as he hurried out of the room.

He soon returned with a glass full of water, and found Diana with her presence of mind sufficiently restored to enable her to exert herself to the utmost to try and repair the injury caused by the accident. Her face, however, still wore a woeful expression of distress.

"It's on your frock too!" cried Bertie.

"Oh, I don't care a straw about my frock, that can be washed, but the mauve silk—the lovely mauve silk!"

"There won't be a mark on it!" said

Bertie, with the buoyant hopefulness of boyhood; "I'll wash out the stains in a minute!"

"Oh, dear! I think that the water makes it look worse!" exclaimed Diana.

"Only while it is wet, you could not leave the grease spots upon it!" Bertie was rubbing with energy all the time that he spoke. "Now let's hold it to the fire to dry it."

"Not so near or you'll singe it!" cried Diana; "and—oh, look how it's wrinkling—oh, dear! oh, dear! we do nothing but make matters worse!"

Bertie Vane's countenance fell, for he could not but perceive that there was truth in his sister's remark.

"It has been washed—now it ought to be ironed," said he after a pause, during which he had been dejectedly surveying the flounce.

"We must leave it alone—we only do mischief," cried Diana. "What will Cousin Eleanor say? she'll be so dreadfully angry—she'll never forgive me for spoiling her dress!"

"You did not spoil it, it was I who threw over the plate with the sauce! I wish—I wish," added Bertie passionately, "that—that

unlucky turbot had never been fished out of the sea!"

"Or that you had left it alone," observed Diana.

"I wish that I had!" echoed her brother.

"What are we to do now?" sighed the little girl.

"I suppose," said Bertie very slowly, "that I ought to tell all about it, and take the blame on myself. But I can't do it!" he added impetuously, "it would be so horridly awkward! I can't go and say that I went and picked a bit of fish off the dish, and carried it away to eat in the study! ugh! can't you fancy how Lady Waters would raise up her eyebrows, and how Warren would burst out into his loud laugh!"

"I don't see," observed Diana, "why we need say anything at all about it. I will take up the flounce to Vicars, and she will iron it, and smooth it, and make the best of it. She won't tell of us, I am quite sure, for Cousin Eleanor would be just as angry with her for having trusted me with the silk, as she could be with her for soiling it a little."

"Yes, Vicars is bound not to peach, for

you got into all this pack of troubles from trying to help her. Yours is the best plan," said Bertie, who shrank from the idea of the ridicule which his clumsiness and greediness would bring upon himself were the whole truth to be known. "Vicars is so clever, she will cover over the part, or cut out a bit, or put something to hide the stains! Depend on it, Eleanor will never find out that anything is the matter." Bertie's tone was cheerful, but conscience pressed a little on his heart as he spoke.

"I had better go to Vicars at once," said Diana sadly, as she began to fold up the silk; "I have no heart to work any more. It is very discouraging for such a thing to happen, just when I was trying to do a little good!"

"Yes, it all came of your kindness," observed Bertie, who was glad enough to pass over his own share of the business, and who forgot at the moment that Diana's pride had been excited as well as her benevolence.

Diana was absent for some time, but she returned with a face more serene.

"I thought that you were never coming

back!" exclaimed Bertie. "What did Vicars say to the flounce?"

"Oh, she was extremely vexed, as you may fancy," said Diana, "but she promised to do all that she could to make it look as nice as at first; and she promised me faithfully never to tell; I'm sure that she'll keep her word."

"I hope that she won't get into a scrape," observed Bertie, who had some misgivings on the subject.

The two sat chatting together for nearly an hour in the study, but the cheerfulness of the evening was damped. This was the quiet time which would have been most suitable for carrying out the Vanes' intention of praying together; as the company would not leave Aspen Hall till an hour so late as to leave no opportunity for social devotion. But the painful affair of the flounce had put the subject altogether out of the mind of Diana. It was not so with Bertie; he thought again and again of the prayer, and once rose and shut the door preparatory to proposing to his sister that they should join in asking for "grace." What was it that restrained the boy from fufilling his intention? what made him feel

that he would rather not pray, at least *just then?* Was it not that he was afraid that his prayer should be granted, that he and Diana should be made to see the path of duty so plainly that they would have no excuse for not pursuing it? Bertie had a suspicion that the course which he and his young companion were taking was mean and not straightforward, and something within him told him that it would be a mockery to pray for help to do that which he had no intention of doing, or for guidance, when he had made up his mind as to what way he would take. The least sin harboured in the heart makes us unwilling to open that heart to God. It has been well observed that "prayer must drive out sin, or sin will drive out prayer." If ever we find ourselves unwilling to ask for grace, we may be sure that we sorely need it.

Without speaking another word on the subject which had occupied their minds in the morning, Diana and Bertie let the quiet time in the study slip away, until it was necessary to prepare for appearing in the drawing-room. Diana came down in her clear white muslin, with blue ribbons and sash, with her flaxen

hair floating over her shoulders, just as the ladies left the dining-table, and came rustling into the room, to gather round the fire, or form little knots for gossip on luxurious ottomans and sofas. Diana received some notice, and stood smiling and blushing at the compliments paid her, little aware how completely those compliments were spoken as a matter of course. She did not yet know, it was hardly to be expected that she should know, how lightly silly words of flattery are uttered, that only too easily take root in the young unsuspecting heart. They are like the thistle-down, light as air, and pleasant to look at, that may produce a future crop against which the husbandman will strive in vain! Diana was so much pleased and amused, that she forgot even her trouble about the silk flounce, except when she raised her eyes to the tall, stately form of Eleanor, who looked to her more formidable than ever in the grandeur of her full evening dress. "I am sure that I could never confess anything to her," thought Diana; "I hope, oh, how I hope that Cousin Eleanor will never find out our secret!"

Bertie was rather strengthened in his opin-

ion that all grand ladies have a dislike to boys, for he felt himself very much out of place amongst the flowers and the flounces. He stood for a good part of the evening with his thumbs in his waiscoat pockets, in a corner near the piano, into which accident had wedged him, too shy and awkward to cross the large room and face the eyes and eye-glasses of the ladies. Twice, indeed, some guest was good-natured enough to address him—each time with the interesting question, "Have you been walking to-day?" but Bertie's chief amusement in his corner was watching what was going on, and while avoiding notice, making his quiet observations on the scene before him.

"How that lady in green does talk, and she never has a smile off her face! I wonder now if that smile is natural, or if it is only put on. She can't even say that the weather is cold without showing all her teeth in a smile, as if frost were the funniest thing in the world! Perhaps, if that salve of knowledge were rubbed on my eyes, I should see that there is a deal of care and vexation hidden under those smiles. No one who looks

at Eleanor now would guess how much vexed she was to-day with her brother. Those ladies on the ottoman, what ill-natured things they are saying in their smooth polite sort of way! How they are talking of their friends the Misses Green; I do not know what sort of people these may be, but to judge by what these dames are saying of their clothes and their music, they must dress like dowdies, and scream like peacocks! I can't help thinking of the humming-birds that turned into wasps in the Palace of Deceits."

As the idea crossed Bertie's mind the door opened, the Misses Green were announced, and two stout good-humoured looking ladies entered, each with a roll of music in her hand. Instantly the ladies on the ottoman rose to welcome them, with faces radiant with smiles. "So charmed to see you, with your music!" "We're expecting to have quite a treat!" Bertie remembered what he had heard but a few minutes before, and the simple honesty of his soul revolted from what appeared to him like treacherous kindness.

"How much amazed these poor Misses Green would be," thought the boy, "if they

knew how differently those ladies speak of them behind their backs! One would soon get disgusted with the Palace of Deceits if one could always get a peep of what lies under the painting and gilding."

The gentlemen now joined the ladies, and the hum of conversation grew louder. It was a little interrupted, however, when the keys of the grand piano were struck, and almost subsided into silence when the Misses Green began a fine bravura duet. Bertie was so near that he had the full benefit of the noise; and a secret wish arose in his mind that his ears had been provided with lids as well as his eyes. When all the shaking and flourishing were over, many were the compliments paid to the performers, but especially by the ladies who had been seated upon the ottoman.

"Don't you like muisc?" said one of them in a soft voice, deigning to address her question to Bertie.

"Some sorts of music," answered the boy.

"What kind of music, my dear?"

"Such tunes as 'The British Grenadiers,'" said honest Bertie, with an uncomfortable consciousness that he would be despised for

his want of fine taste. He saw from the glance of Miss Green who still occupied the music-stool, that his simple answer had given some offence.

"Ah, well," reflected the boy, "it seems that it is more fashionable to say one thing and think another, to flatter people one minute and laugh at them the next, than to be honest and straightforward in the world. I don't see how any one could keep truthful for long if they lived in the Palace of Deceits!"

The party did not break up till after midnight, so that the Sunday had begun before any one retired to rest. Little Diana's eyes had grown very heavy, and Bertie had yawned so often, even in the middle of the singing, that the ladies had agreed in regarding him as a very vulgar, stupid young boy, not fit for civilized society. Bertie forgot his prayers that night; Diana fell asleep while trying to say hers in bed; as for Stenie, he had drunk too greedily of the Fountain of Pleasure to have any inclination to turn his mind to the subject of religion.

CHAPTER VIII.

SELF-INDULGENCE.

"YOURS is quite a Sunday story, Aunt Eva, so may we not have a little of it before we go to church?" said Bertie on the following morning, as he and Diana sat in the cottage by the invalid.

"I want to know how Seele and Irrend got on in their journey through the great forest," added Diana.

"You shall hear, my love," replied Eva; "we will have a little more examination of the silver casket. But you look pale, dear child," observed the lady; "have you had anything to tire or to vex you?"

"I did not get to bed till late, very late," replied Diana, indulging in a yawn; "but I like to sit up," she added more briskly, "I should like not to go to bed till two, or three,

or four; do you know that Cousin Eleanor once sat up till *five!* Was not that a charming thing, Aunt Eva?"

"I should think it more charming to *rise* at five, and enjoy the freshness of the morning, the sparkling sunshine, the dewy mead, the balmy delicious air!" and Eva suppressed a sigh which rose to her lips at the thought that, prisoner as she was on her couch of pain, she never again could enjoy upon earth those innocent pleasures which leave no weariness behind. Unwilling to cast the shade of her own trial over her companions, she cheerfully resumed her narration.

CONTINUATION OF EVA'S STORY.

"And so here we are in the forest!" exclaimed Seele, "and it is no such terrible place after all. There seem to be plenty of wild flowers growing here, and some of them right on the path. I daresay that we shall have a very happy time, wandering through the wood together. My heart feels light as a bird!"

"I should like a few more companions," said Irrend. "If this way through the forest

be a long one, I hope that we may meet some people on the way."

"I've made such a discovery," cried Seele joyfully; "there is not a chance of our ever being lost in this wood, however thick the trees may grow! Just look here, there is something written on the bark of every trunk at each side of our path, no doubt to guard us from wandering either to the right or the left."

"And they are words from our Father's letter," cried Irrend. "See, here is, *Flee from the wrath to come;* and on the other side of the path, *I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me!*"

"It is a great comfort to have the way made so plain," observed Seele. "I do not know why we should have heard so much of the dangers of the Forest of Temptations; I am sure if it be all like this, we shall have little trouble in passing right through it."

"A mist seems to be rising," remarked Irrend, "we cannot now see far before us."

"It is quite enough if we can see the nearest trees," said Seele cheerfully.

"Hark, I fancy that I hear a rustling in

the leaves!" cried Irrend; "some one is following behind."

The twins turned round and beheld Self-indulgence, one of the servants whom they had known best in the Palace of Deceits, and whom they had always looked upon as a pleasant, good-humoured companion. Seele glanced doubtfully at him, fearing lest Self-indulgence should have come to draw them back from the narrow way; Irrend expected reproaches and persuasions; but never had Self-indulgence worn a more agreeable aspect, than when, panting a little for breath, he overtook the travellers.

"So you are leaving the Palace of Deceits," he exclaimed, "and are bravely making your way through the Forest of Temptations!"

"Do not try to persude us to go back," said Seele; "we have had a message from our Father; our hearts are fixed, and nothing can move us from our purpose."

"I will never try to move you!" cried Self-indulgence with a smile; "I should have thought that you would have known me better. I believe that you are quite right in flying from Sin, though before you did so you

might have given notice of your intention to an old friend like me. Far from wishing to draw you back, I myself am happy to go with you. I am weary of the service of Sin, and think that other places in the world may be found quite as pleasant as the Palace of Deceits."

These words exceedingly rejoiced both the children, for they had always delighted much in the society of Self-indulgence, and they were not yet fully on their guard against his false and flattering tongue. So he joined them as they went on their way, and diverted them so much by his gay conversation, that they paid little regard to the words on the trees, and altogether forgot to pray for grace in the golden cup of conscience.

Seele asked Self-indulgence how it happened that his pictures changed so strangely when the salve of knowledge was applied to the eyes of those who beheld them.

"Ah," replied Self-indulgence lightly, "that was because Sin had supplied me both with my subjects and my colours! Not all my pictures, I can assure you, are hung up in the Palace of Deceits; I have many whose tints

can never be altered, these I shall be happy some day to show you."

"Do you know this forest well?" inquired Irrend.

"I know every nook and dell in the wood," gaily replied Self-indulgence; "I often wander through it by starlight, and indeed I can find my way here just as well by night as by day."

"It does not bear a good character," observed Seele; "are you not sometimes afraid?"

"Afraid? never!" cried Self-indulgence with a laugh, "I have a knack of avoiding everything that might give me trouble or pain. If I come to a place tangled with thorns, why should I tear my dress or rend my skin by pushing through them, I find some pleasant round-about path, and leave the brambles to those who may like them."

"But if you are always taking round-about paths you must make slow progress," said Seele.

"Slow and pleasant," replied Self-indulgence; "where is the use of being in a hurry? Don't we come here to enjoy ourselves?"

"Not only to enjoy ourselves;" said Seele; "we ought to press on towards the home where alone full enjoyment can be found."

"Oh, those who press on so fast only weary themselves," cried Self-indulgence, who perceived with secret delight that in the increasing mistiness he was gradually drawing his trusting companions a little to the left of the path. "I assure you, my dear young friends, that many have taken me for their guide through the Forest of Temptations, and have found their journey quite a expedition of pleasure! Sometimes we danced, sometimes we sang, sometimes we gathered wild fruits, or made chaplets of beautiful flowers. We were perfectly easy and happy; as for enemies, we never saw any; as for cares, we threw them aside; we made it our business to laugh and be merry; what more could mortals desire?"

Seele had no time to answer, for at that moment he struck his foot against the root of an old tree, and stumbled with such violence that he fell.

"Up again!" cried Self-indulgence, "I guess that no bones are broken!"

"The golden cup has struck against my chest and hurt me," said Seele, as he slowly arose from the ground. Glancing down at the root over which he had stumbled, he saw the words, *be sober, be vigilant,* dimly traced upon it.

"I wonder if we are in the right way!" cried the boy, a suspicion of the truth arising in his mind.

"Of course we are in the right way," said Irrend, "why do you hesitate now? Surely, Seele, you are not the boy to care for a little stumble like that."

"Come on, come on!" exclaimed Self-indulgence, "every one falls now and then, but no one of spirit takes it to heart!"

"I do not think that this *is* the narrow way," said Seele more decidedly, "it does not seem strait enough to me."

"What nonsense you are talking!" cried Self-indulgence. "Did I not tell you that I am quite accustomed to guide travellers through this forest?"

"But our Father never gave us Self-indulgence for a guide," said Seele, whose suspicions were growing more strong.

"We can't wait till you have got over all

your silly scruples!" exclaimed Irrend; "I'm going on now with my friend, you may follow or not as you please.'

"We'll soon have you coming after us!" laughed Self-indulgence; "you will not care to struggle on all alone."

Seele felt annoyed and perplexed; he was unwilling to let his companions go on before him, and yet his misgivings were great. Suddenly he bethought himself of prayer. "What folly has been mine," he exclaimed, "not to make use of means so simple for finding out whether all be right! Self-indulgence with his idle conversation, has put everything else from my mind." Seele drew his golden cup from his bosom, and bent his knee in prayer. For some time he prayed, yet the mist in the forest seemed only to gather more thickly, and his heart grew heavier as he felt the loneliness of his situation. He kept his eyes, however, bent on the cup which he held, and gradually a dim light shone within it, fainter than the spark of a glow-worm. Still more earnestly Seele prayed, and the light grew brighter and clearer, till it suddenly shot up, as a vivid flash, and Seele was startled to be-

hold by its radiance that he was almost close to the walls of the Palace of Deceits, which he thought that he had left far behind him.

"Ha, our smooth-tongued companion is a traitor! he is misleading us—he is drawing us back into the power of the enemy!" exclaimed Seele, as he sprang to his feet. "Ho, Irrend, my brother! come back! come back! Self-indulgence will betray you to Sin!"

Loud was the warning call of Seele, but the only reply was Irrend's laugh faintly heard in the distance; his form was quite hidden by the mist. Again Seele called aloud to his brother, but Irrend only quickened his pace, like too many amongst us, unwilling to hear truth, because it is painful.

"What can I do?" exclaimed Seele. "It is vain to pursue my brother, I shall but wander farther from the way. I had better retrace my steps till I return to the very point at which Self-indulgence met us. Oh, Irrend, Irrend, I will pray for thee! may thy eyes be opened ere too late. Mayst thou see that Self-indulgence is dangerous as a companion, and fatal as a guide!"

While Seele, warned in time, by his

stumble, was carefully tracking back his way, Irrend, without any doubt or fear, sauntered on by the side of Self-indulgence.

"That brother of mine is easily frightened," he observed, "and takes odd fancies into his head; while my conscience lies so quiet in my bosom, I shall not easily be persuaded that anything is wrong."

Irrend did not choose to remember that an easy conscience is not always a good one; that it is possible, by neglect, to render even conscience so dull that it ceases to serve as a guide; as a clock that is never wound up no longer can point to the hour.

Self-indulgence grew more and more pleasant and amusing. He and Irrend, as they walked on together, built fanciful castles in the air, laid many plans for amusment, and talked over various schemes for enjoyment.

"I don't regret now," observed Irrend, "that I left the Palace of Deceits as soon as I found out the danger of remaining there. I have no idea of being a prisoner in any place, however delightful it may be; a free and easy life is my choice."

"Ay, ay," said Self-indulgence laughing,

"your motto is, *Let me do what I like,* and a very sensible motto it is."

"I suppose," observed Irrend, "that Seele would prefer, *Let me do what I ought;* and perhaps," he added more gravely, "in the long run his may be the best."

"Not for the young, not for the joyous!" cried Self-indulgence; "it is time enough to take to such mottoes when care has wrinkled the brow, and age sobered the spirits."

"I daresay that when I am a man," said Irrend, "I shall be just as earnest in my work, and as careful in my conduct as Seele or any one else; but in the meantime—"

"In the meantime," interrupted Self-indulgence, "you will rest yourself a little on your way. Here we have come to a charming place, where we shall be sure of a hearty welcome!'"

"Why," exclaimed Irrend in surprise, looking at a small postern door just before him, and then glancing up at the building to which it belonged, "surely my eyes deceive me, or we have come back to the Palace of Deceits!"

Self-indulgence burst out laughing. "You have been going round in a circle," said he,—

"it is the nature of every one walking in a mist to do so, and to find himself at last close to the point from which he started. But don't take it amiss," continued the traitor blandly, seeing a mortified look upon the countenance of Irrend, "really no harm has been done. You need but rest for the night in the Palace of Deceits, you can leave it whenever you please. You know something of its comforts and pleasures; just turn in, my friend, for awhile, and take the word of Self-indulgence, you shall not be a captive but a guest."

Alas, for poor wandering Irrend! he was but too easily persuaded, he had begun to grow weary, and he had not the courage to turn his back upon Self-indulgence, and begin the fatiguing task of retracing his steps through the wood. He was thirsty, and longed to taste again of the Fountain of Pleasure; so with scarcely a feeling of fear or regret, he re-entered the Palace of Deceits.

CHAPTER IX.

SAYING "NO" TO SELF.

"WHAT a silly wretched creature Irrend was!" exclaimed Diana. "I am sure that none of us would have trusted such a traitor as that Self-indulgence!"

"I am not so sure of that," said Bertie, slowly and thoughtfully. He had the habit of looking more deeply into truths than his sister ever did, and while Diana merely listened to the story, Bertie was trying to open the silver casket, and discover the secret of what it contained.

"Fancy his going round in a circle," cried Diana, "and finding himself at the very place from which he had set out!"

"Aunt Eva," said Bertie Vane, "I want to know exactly what you mean by Self-indulgence?"

"What do you yourself suppose it to be?" asked the lady.

"I suppose that self-indulgence is the very reverse of self-denial."

"You are not far wrong," said Eva de Vere.

Bertie's expression grew graver than before. "I don't like that word self-denial," observed he, "Mrs. Gray is always using it, and it seems to me to mean everything that is disagreeable. Surely, Aunt Eva, it is not our duty to make ourselves as uncomfortable as we can, to do everything that we *don't* like; to be always denying ourselves, and to think that because a thing is pleasant therefore that it must needs be wrong!"

"That is *not* our duty, that is not the self-denial which religion requires," replied Eva.

"Then what is self-denial?" asked Bertie, "and what is the self-indulgence which led poor Irrend astray?"

"You may know them by the two mottoes introduced into my story, 'Let me do what I *like*,' and 'Let me do what I *ought*.' One or other of these mottoes is adopted by us all. These might be divided into two classes: those

who are guided by conscience, and those who are guided by self-indulgence. When conscience points one way, and self-indulgence the other, then to keep to the right is self-denial."

"It is easy to understand that," said Diana.

But Bertie did not look satisfied yet. "It is easy to understand it in a general way," he observed, "but I like to come to particular cases. For instance," and Bertie gave the illustration which most readily occurred to his mind, "do you call it wrong to enjoy a good feast?"

"No," replied Eva with a smile, while Diana burst into a merry laugh, in which her brother could not help joining.

"You do not then think that the love of eating is self-indulgence?" asked Bertie, as soon as his mirth was over.

"I do not think it sinful self-indulgence if it be quite under the control of conscience," replied the lady.

"Oh, aunty, you cannot bring conscience into such little matters as that!" cried Diana.

"It seems to me that even in such little matters as that," observed Eva, "there is room

for conscience to act, and conscience may prescribe self-denial. For example, my love," she continued, smoothing back with her thin hand the flaxen locks of her niece; "suppose that you were walking in an orchard, without permission to take any of the fruit, and like our first mother, Eve, you were tempted to pluck it and eat; do you not see that Self-indulgence would be whispering, 'Let me do what I like,' Conscience saying, 'Let me do what I ought,' and that if you resolutely obeyed your conscience, you would be practising real self-denial?"

"Because to take what was not my own would be stealing," said little Diana.

"I could suggest many other cases," said Eva. "Suppose that some fruit was lawfully your own, but that you knew that it would be most refreshing to some sick or dying invalid, conscience might well command self-denial. Or if you were inclined at table to take something that would injure your health—"

"Now," interrupted Bertie, "I do not see that conscience would have anything to do with that. If I choose to enjoy myself now,

knowing that I must pay for it afterwards, I may do a foolish thing, to be sure, but you can't make it out to be a wrong one."

"I think that I can show it to be wrong in two different ways," replied Eva.

"If I think the treat worth a sick headache, no one suffers but myself," persisted Bertie Vane.

"In a world where each has to do with others, dear boy, we have no right needlessly to trifle with health, or to destroy our own power of adding to the pleasure of those around us. Health is a precious talent, not to be thrown away lightly."

"Well, certainly," said Bertie, shrugging his shoulders, "I believe that when I have any ache, I grow as cross as a bear, and poor Di comes off second best! But you said just now that you could show that such self-indulgence would be wrong in *two* ways; I can't for the life of me think of any other."

"Every Christian has to some degree the honour of his faith to uphold; he must show that even in such matters as eating and drinking, he has his inclinations under control, and can firmly say 'No' to self. We lose our in-

fluence for good if we give the world just cause to laugh at our conduct."

Bertie opened his eyes wide with astonishment. "Why, I thought," he exclaimed, "that Christians should never mind one bit being laughed at by the world!"

"They should never mind being laughed at for their religion, dear Bertie," said Eva; "but they should mind—they should earnestly avoid being laughed at for weakness and self-indulgence. I will tell you of a little incident which strongly impressed this truth on my mind. A clergyman, an excellent man, once in my presence most earnestly recommended temperance to a young friend of my own, who was in great danger of acquiring the ruinous habit of hard drinking. The minister spoke so touchingly, so convincingly, that he brought the tears into my eyes, and I could not understand the quiet indifference with which his words were received; they seemed to make no impression at all. When the clergyman had left the room, I asked young D—— whether he were not struck by his earnest pleadings. He laughed as he made reply, 'Oh, he talked well against whisky, I own, but would all the

speaking in the world talk *him* out of his love for salmon-trout?"

"That was hard, very hard on the clergyman," cried Bertie, "for there was no harm in his liking his salmon!"

"The liking was innocent in itself," replied Eva, "but I own that I was not able to parry the scoff. I knew that the good man *was* very fond of the pleasures of the table, and I could not but feel that the youth *had hit a weak point* in a character otherwise most worthy of esteem. The Christian clergyman would have been more honoured, he would have had more influence over others, had he less eagerly indulged in earthly enjoyments, though in themselves they might be lawful."

"But if the clergyman had been sitting down to dinner, and a poor sick man had wanted to see him," asked Diana, fixing her artless blue eyes on her aunt, "would he not have said to himself, even if ever so hungry, 'Let me do what I ought,' and have left the dinner, and cared for the poor?"

"He might; yes, I hope that he would have done so," replied Eva, "but I fear that his love of self-indulgence would have made

him less readily follow his conscience, it would have been a stumbling-block in his way. I know that the minister whom he succeeded, had been in the habit of giving an early service, as he knew that some work-people were glad to attend it before beginning the labours of the day. But the clergyman of whom I am speaking, found it hard to leave his warm bed on cold dark winter mornings; the early service was inconvenient, he soon began to think it useless, in a few weeks it was dropped altogether. I have heard that some of those who had been accustomed to frequent it, gave up going to the church from that time."

"Oh, what a pity!" cried Diana. "He would certainly have done more good, if he had turned away from self-indulgence!"

"The worst of it is," observed Bertie, "that if we let self-indulgence get tight hold of us in our harmless things, we can't well shake him off in what is downright wicked. If you'd seen Warren Waters last evening, when he came up from the dinner-table! Ah, self-indulgence had been turning him round and round! I am sure he had had too much wine."

"Do not speak of his faults, dear Bertie," said Eva, "we have enough to do to find out our own. I should not even have mentioned to you the case of the clergyman, had he not been quite unknown to you both."

"I only meant to show," answered Bertie, "that if we can't say 'No' to self about eating, we won't be able to say 'No' about other matters. And yet it seems so strange to bring religion into such common everyday things! Is there anything in the Bible about them?"

"Do you not remember the words of St. Paul, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God?*"

"I never understood how that could be," said Bertie, "but I think that I see now some of its meaning. We must honour God by obeying our conscience in everything great or small; we must as a habit do what we ought and not what we like to do, and if Self-indulgence come in the way, we must be firm and thrust him aside."

"Was that not what Daniel did," inquired Diana, "when he refused all the tempting

food which he could not take without breaking the law of his God?"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Bertie; "he chose rather to live upon grain and water, than feast on the dainties of the king. He could bravely say 'No' to self. But I've often thought," added the boy, "that I am very glad that I am not obliged in that way to follow the example of Daniel."

"Has self-indulgence to do with anything besides eating and drinking?" inquired Diana.

"Oh, yes, my love," replied her aunt; "it has to do with everything that regards the pleasures of earth! There is self-indulgence in dress, if we spend too much time or money upon it. We see something that we desire to buy; we know that the money may be spent far more wisely, perhaps that some poor orphan requires our aid. 'Let me do what I like with my money,' cries Self-indulgence; 'Let me do what I ought,' answers Conscience; if conscience be obeyed, self-denial is practised; we have won a victory over ourselves; we have sought to please our heavenly Father."

"But it is very difficult," observed Bertie

Vane, "to be always practising self-denial. I think that it would be easier to do some great thing once for all, than to keep every day of our lives on the watch against self-indulgence."

"It is by obedience in little things," said Eva, "that we exercise ourselves for decision in great ones. Had Daniel given way to self-indulgence when tempted to partake of the forbidden dainties of the heathen, it is not likely that his faith would have stood firm when he was threatened with ravening lions."

"I know what made him so brave!" exclaimed Diana; "do you not remember how he knelt down and prayed to God three times a day? Did not Daniel ask God for His grace?"

"And was not that grace abundantly given?" said Eva. "Does not Daniel shine forth to all ages as a man who took conscience for his guide, whom neither self-indulgence could draw aside, nor fear turn from the straight path of duty. But now," added Eva, glancing at the clock, "it is time for you both to go to church; the bells have long been ringing. Goodbye

to you, my beloved ones; may God graciously guard and guide you through the daily temptations of this life! *Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!*"

CHAPTER X.

QUIET CONVERSE.

"DI," said Bertie to his sister, as they left the cottage together, "I think that that cunning traitor, Self-indulgence, joined you and me yesterday as we walked through the Forest of Temptations. Indeed it seems to me that I have always been taking him for my companion, and I do believe that is why, though I make good resolutions and set out bravely from the Palace of Deceits, I always seem coming back again to the old, old ways!"

"I think that you were very good indeed yesterday," said Diana. "Did you not make me leave off our nice game of croquet, and did you not come and read to me while I worked? I am sure that you did what you *ought*, instead of what you *liked*, and said 'No' to self like a man!"

"Ah, but I did'nt keep it up," observed Bertie. "I'm not sure that I was quite right about the turbot, or I should not so hate the notion of any one knowing about it. And then to keep the accident with the flounce such a secret!"

"Oh, pray don't come upon that!" cried Diana, who felt uneasy whenever the subject was mentioned.

"Well, I won't, since you don't like it; let's talk about something else. Did we not hear that there was to be a charity sermon to-day for the hospital for the blind?"

"Yes, a paper was sent round to the hall. Lady Waters has given twenty pounds at once. I don't think that she liked doing so, for she grumbled a good deal—they say she is very fond of her money; but Eleanor insisted that if nothing were done, there would be such a talk in the country—and Warren said something about the Duke of Drayton, which seemed to settle the matter. Only think—twenty pounds! was that not a noble subscription?"

"Yes," replied Bertie rather slowly; "it was almost as large a sum as Lady Waters gave for her last diamond ring!"

"But it is quite natural that she should like jewellery," said Diana, "and there's nothing so pretty as diamonds. I have three shillings now in my purse, and I mean to buy three little charms like these which Eleanor wears on her chain. Mine won't be gold ones, of course, but they will look just as pretty as hers. I saw such beauties when Lady Waters took me to the town on Friday; little fans, and parasols, and baskets—the sweetest things you can imagine. They were only a shilling a-piece, and oh, how they took my fancy! I would have bought them directly, but unluckily I had left my purse at home, and I did not like asking Lady Waters to lend me the money."

"You have a fine opportunity now for exercising self-denial," observed Bertie.

"I don't mean to do so," replied Diana Vane. "Three shillings would go but a very little way towards building an hospital, and I want the charms very much. It is not, you know," she added, as if a little ashamed of her own words, "it is not the same thing as if I *saw* some one very hungry or ragged; then I could not bear not to give them relief; but I

don't care much for blind people of whom I know nothing; and just to drop my money into a plate—I do not care at all to do that!"

"I suppose that means that you only give when you *like* to do so, not when you think that you *ought*. Ah, I suspect that old Self-indulgence has something to do even with charity."

"You may give your own money," said Diana rather sharply, "you need not trouble yourself about mine!"

"But, unluckily, I've none to give," cried Bertie. "I spent my last sixpence on that very same Friday."

"Where?" interrupted Diana.

"Well, if I must confess it," replied Bertie, "at the confectioner's shop."

"Ah!" cried Diana with a merry little laugh, "then you have no right to preach self-denial."

"But I mean to turn over a new leaf," began Bertie, but he did not finish his sentence, for at that moment Lady Waters' fine carriage rolled past, going to the church towards which the young Vanes were walking.

"There's no one in it but Eleanor," observed Diana.

"I suppose that Lady Waters has one of her headaches after her party; I think that she has always a headache on Sundays!" laughed Bertie.

"I don't believe that Warren ever goes to church," said Diana, "and Stenie is getting into his ways. I am sure that the motto of both is, *Let me do what I like*, and never, *Let me do what I ought*."

To Eleanor Waters indeed attendance in the house of prayer was a mere lifeless form, something which could not decently be omitted, but in which she found neither pleasure nor profit. Eleanor could criticize a preacher, and often did so; the smallest defect in the voice or the manner of the messenger of God, was quite sufficient excuse to her mind for entirely neglecting the message. Her thoughts during the whole of the service were wandering in every direction; to the letter brought by the morning's post, the guest expected to dinner, the archery-meeting of the morrow, the dress which she was to wear, the acquaintance whom she would see, the last new novel which she

had been reading! Self-indulgence had bound her hand and foot, and she had not a wish to escape from his power. And yet even Eleanor ofttimes felt that the Fountain of Pleasure was growing to her tasteless, and sometimes bitter; the tinted windows in her Palace of Deceits were losing their brightness of hue; Eleanor might be amused, but she was not happy! The world cannot satisfy the longing for bliss implanted in the human heart; but the lady knew of no purer, more lasting delights, and she resolutely shut her eyes to the truth, that "Self-indulgence is dangerous as a companion, and fatal as a guide!"

Eleanor returned, as she came, in the carriage; the Vanes who were never quite at ease in her presence, preferred their quiet walk over the fields.

"Ah, Di," said Bertie to his sister, "I see that you have made up your mind to say 'No' to Self-indulgence!"

"How can you tell?" said Diana, blushing.

"Have I not eyes in my head, and when I was obliged to let the plate pass, because I had not a farthing—did I not see a little hand put two bright shillings in it?"

"It was what the clergyman said that made me do so," said Diana. "When he explained the words of the text, *If ye love me, keep My commandments,* it reminded me of what aunty spoke to us about obeying the wishes of a dying friend. We were shown that we should not only be kind to the poor when we see them, and can't help feeling sorry for them, but that we should *always* do what good it is in our power to do, for the sake of the Lord who says to us all, *If ye love me, keep My commandments.*"

"Ah, yes," observed Bertie Vane, "it is clear to me that it is only loving God that can keep us steady in self-denial. We should soon tire of saying to ourselves, *Let me do what I ought,* if there were not grateful love to turn duty into a pleasure."

"And grace to help us," added Diana.

"There is Betty Miller's cottage," said Bertie; "I did not see the old woman at church, I daresay that her rheumatism is worse. The door is shut, as if to keep out the draught."

"Do you know, Bertie, what Conscience is whispering to me now?" asked Diana.

"Perhaps just the same thing as it is saying to me."

"I was thinking that it would be a good plan if, after luncheon, you and I were to come here together, and read the Bible to the good old creature, as she is too blind to read to herself."

"You have hit it!" exclaimed Bertie, gaily. "I felt so much ashamed at having nothing to give to-day in church, remembering *why* I had nothing to give, that I'm glad to find out any plan to put me in better humour with myself. You've shown more self-denial than I have, Di."

"Ah, but I have kept *one* shilling, you know," said his sister; "I could not give up the little fairy fan, that opens and shuts so prettily. I've set my heart upon that."

"Why, there go Warren and Stenie!" exclaimed Bertie suddenly, stopping and looking towards a copse at some distance.

"Where? you don't mean those two men with guns—there—beyond the bushes!" cried Diana. "That never can be Stenie, for he would not go out shooting on Sunday."

"It is Stenie," said Bertie decidedly; "I

BERTIE AND DIANA RETURNING FROM CHURCH.

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could tell him half a mile off by his swinging kind of walk—he does not step out firmly."

"Oh, what would papa and mamma say to his spending Sunday in such a way?" cried Diana, looking very grave.

"We had better come on now, Di; it's no fault of ours," said Bertie. "If I were to say a word about it to Stenie, he'd knock me down as soon as he'd look at me. We can't keep him back from self-indulgence."

"There's only one thing which we could do," said Diana, laying her hand gently on the arm of her brother; "when we pray to God to give us His grace, we could beg Him to give it to poor Stenie also."

Bertie nodded assent. "We'll not forget prayers this evening," said he; "not that I forgot them in the study yesterday, but—but something made me feel so disinclined, that I did not like to remind you about them."

"There is another thing which I have been thinking that it might be right for me to do," observed Diana. "Vicars told me this morning that her mother is a very good woman, and brought her up in the fear of God, and read the Bible to her morning and night. Then

her last mistress, Miss Law, who has gone to Malta, was so kind and good, Vicars says, and often spoke to her of her soul; but since Vicars has come to the hall, she has hardly had any time at all to think of religion. The tears came into her eyes when she spoke about it, I could see her face in the looking-glass while she was plaiting my hair, and then she stopped to cough—oh, such a cough! If Vicars were to turn very ill, like Aunt Eva, she would not have the comfort and peace that makes dear aunt not afraid to die."

"What can you do for her?" inquired Bertie.

"I could read to her sometimes while she works, or while she is doing my hair; or repeat to her Aunt Eva's stories, and tell her about the Palace of Deceits, and Self-indulgence, and all that."

"And I could lend her my hymn-book," said Bertie; "she might sing to herself while she works."

"It would be so pleasant to do her good!" cried Diana; "she is such a gentle, obliging creature."

"I'm just afraid that we have rather been

doing her harm," said Bertie. "We are at this moment tempting Vicars to be not quite honest and truthful—if that flounce—"

"Oh, don't talk of that flounce!" cried Diana; "I hope and trust that Cousin Eleanor will never know anything about it! Vicars says that she can manage quite cleverly to cover up the stain."

"Don't you think," said Bertie after a pause, "that we may be doing what we *like* in hiding the truth, rather than doing what we *ought?* May not acting slyly from a fear of blame, be a kind of self-indulgence, just as bad as any other can be?"

"I wish that you would not speak so!" cried Diana almost pettishly; "don't you see that every one of us three would be in a dreadful scrape if anything were known, and if we only keep quiet and say nothing, Eleanor will neither be vexed nor angry, and the whole affair will blow over."

Bertie was not convinced, but he was silenced, and all the more easily because his sister's wishes fell in with his own inclination. Little more conversation passed between them before the Vanes reached the hall, where they

found Lady Waters in some excitement, and the liveried servants in a greater bustle than usual.

"What can be going on?" whispered Bertie to his sister; "surely we are not going to have another dinner-party to-day?"

Lady Waters overheard the whisper, and answered the question. "My friend the Duke of Drayton is coming," she said, with a kind of fluttered pride in her manner, as if the fact of knowing a duke made her feel at least two inches taller; "I only received his note by this morning's post, and he will be with us by five!"

Diana glanced at Eleanor who was present, and could not avoid noticing that the colour rose in her cheeks, even to her brow, although she was usually pale. Miss Waters looked colder and prouder than ever, and never once opened her lips to speak during the whole time that the luncheon lasted.

CHAPTER XI.

A WARNING.

"BERTIE, did you notice how strange Cousin Eleanor looked when Lady Waters talked of the duke's coming?" said Diana in a confidential tone to her brother, as they set out for the cottage of Betty.

"I never saw her flush so before," observed Bertie; "I thought that she was past the colouring age. But I suppose that a duke is thought such a tremendous great gun, that he makes enough of noise in the place to startle even proud, stately Miss Waters!"

"I'm curious to see him," said Di; "I've heard some talk of him before, for this is not his first visit to the hall. People say that no one likes him, he is so very stingy, and has such a violent temper."

"Ah, who takes to evil-speaking now?" cried Bertie, nudging her arm.

"But it does not look as if the duke could be a good man," persisted Diana, "when he comes travelling upon Sunday, and turning all the house topsy-turvy! Vicars could not get to church in the morning, because she had so many things to attend to, and now she can't get to the evening service, because there is to be such a grand dressing for dinner! Oh, how the poor thing wishes that Miss Law had taken her with her to Malta!"

"Sunday is not much like Sunday at Aspen Hall," observed Bertie; "only as no one takes much notice of small fry like you and me, we can do pretty well what we please. When there's no friend to remind us of our duty, there's more need that we should keep a watch over ourselves."

"I should not like Aspen Hall for a home," said Diana, "but it is pleasant enough for a time. Only there seems so little of family love! Warren and Eleanor are always sparring; Lady Waters finds fault with them both; no one considers any one's wishes but her

own; each does just what she likes, and that makes jarring and worry."

"It makes one think of those words in the Proverbs," said Bertie; "*Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.*"

The Vanes saw an exemplification of this truth as soon as they entered the cottage of Betty Miller. Bertie's guess had been correct, the poor old woman's rheumatism had been worse, and this had kept her from church. But the brother and sister found Betty, notwithstanding her pain, with her wrinkled face bright with pleasure. She had a guest in her home; not a duke indeed, but one whose presence was more welcome to her than that of any lordly visitor could be. A sweet, little curly-headed boy, of about three years of age, was nestling in the old woman's arms, and on the entrance of strangers, coyly hid his rosy face on her bosom.

"We don't find you alone to-day," said Diana, as she seated herself on a wooden chair with a broken back,—there were but two chairs in the cottage. "Is that your little grandchild, Mrs. Miller?"

"Yes, bless his little heart!" exclaimed the old widow, affection brightening her dim grey eyes. "Hold up your head, my darling, and let the young miss see you. His father always spares him to me a bit o' Sabbaths, and I look for'ard to it all the week long. You and me's happy together, ain't we, Teddy?" and the boy looked up in her face with frank confidence, and then clasped his little arms round her neck.

"Don't you find the little fellow troublesome sometimes?" asked Bertie.

"Oh, he's as good as gold!" cried the grandmother proudly. "I never think him a trouble but a pleasure. I says, children be like the flowers, God's sunshine is on them, and it makes it feel like spring time just to look at the dear little faces!"

Diana, by dint of smiles, and shaking her small bunch of keys, soon coaxed the curly-headed child to her side. It amused her to listen to his artless prattle, and the boy was soon quite at his ease with the gracious little lady, though not yet inclined to venture near Bertie.

"I say, my boy, you would not be the worse for a new pair of socks," observed

Bertie, as he glanced down at the little feet that might almost as well have been bare, so much of the soft pink skin peeped through the ragged covering.

The child looked up shyly through his long lashes. "Granny's a making a new pair," he said; "look there—Granny keeps her knitting on the shelf."

"But Granny cannot knit now," said the old woman, sorrowfully; "I've tried again and again, but the needles slip out of my poor, stiff old fingers, and I drop stitches, and can't get 'em up. I hoped to have had them socks ready afore the winter set in, but I han't done the top ribbing of the first." A glance at the fingers, swollen and distorted with rheumatism, was quite sufficient to show that poor Betty was never likely to finish her work. She seemed more grieved at being unable to go on with her little labour of love, than at the painful malady which had prevented her from so doing.

"But Teddy's feet are cold!" said the child; "look what big holes!" and he pointed ruefully towards them with his little chubby finger.

"He was well-nigh crippled with chilblains

last winter, poor lamb!" observed Betty; "and I made them socks for him then; I did say as how he should never want a warm pair as long as I lived, but God sees good to take away the power from my hands; He knows that my heart han't lost the will!"

Diana's fingers were fumbling in her pocket, while Bertie coaxed the child to his side with a stray sugar-plum which he had found wedged in a corner of his. Diana's last bright shilling was quietly pressed into the wrinkled hand of the aged cottager, with the whispered question, "Would you—could you—buy a warm little pair with this?"

Betty's thanks were not many, for she was no woman of words, but the little that she said came warm from a grateful heart. Diana felt a keener pleasure in her sacrifice of self-indulgence, than any fairy charm which ever was made could have brought her.

A pleasant, peaceful hour was spent by the Vanes in that lonely cottage. Bertie read the Bible aloud, while Teddy sat quiet on Diana's knee, and the aged woman, with folded hands, listened to words which to her were spirit and life indeed!

"God bless you, dear young friends," were her parting words when the Vanes were leaving the cottage, "it was His kindness that sent you here. When ye are eyes to the blind, and helpers to the poor, mind ye of the words of the blessed Saviour, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto these, the least of My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.*"

"You are learning your lesson of self-denial pretty fast, Di," observed Bertie to his sister, as they bent their steps homewards.

"I thought that self-denial was a hard, disagreeable duty that we would always escape from if we could," cried Diana, "but I begin to see that it may be a delightful pleasure. I have just a peep at the meaning of those lines which papa thought so fine, and which I thought so strange when he first repeated them to us."

"Do you mean those lines which he gave us a shilling each for learning by heart? I wonder if I could remember them now."

"They began with—

"'Live while you live, the sensualist would say,'

but I don't know what a sensualist is," said Diana.

"I suppose that he is one who is all for self-indulgence," observed Bertie; and he then, with a little hesitation, repeated the well-known lines—

> "'Live while you live, the sensualist would say,
> And seize the pleasures of the passing day!
> Live while you live, the sacred preacher cries,
> And give to God each moment as it flies!
> Lord, in my views may both united be,
> I live to pleasure while I live to Thee!'"

"That is," cried Diana, "that it is real true happiness to live for God, even in this world."

"And then, think of the *next*," said Bertie.

"Holloa, there!" shouted a voice from the other side of the field.

"It's only Stenie, come back from his shooting, we don't want his company," said Bertie; "I'm sure that he made himself disagreeable enough yesterday. Let's walk on as if we didn't hear him."

"But, Bertie, *ought* we not to stop?" suggested Di.

"Oh, I don't like," began Bertie, but he paused.

"Ah, those two little words *like* and *ought*, they are always clashing!" laughed Diana.

"Come here, I say!" shouted Stenie in a tone of anger.

"I'm not his dog to go at his bidding," muttered Bertie. He turned, however, though slowly, and with Diana at his side, crossed the stubble-field towards his brother who was coming to meet him.

"How Stenie is limping!" cried Diana.

"Are you deaf, boy? didn't you hear me when I shouted at first? I'll twist your ears for you if they serve you no better!" was Stenie's irritable greeting.

"What do you want?" asked Bertie, bluffly; and looking up into Stenie's face, he saw an expression of pain upon it.

"I wrenched my ankle in getting over a stile. I've found it precious hard work to get back as far as this; I want your shoulder to lean on." And lean he did, heavily enough.

"I thought that Warren was with you," said Diana; "did he know that you were hurt?"

"Warren does not care for any one but himself; he only laughed and said that it was nothing. I wish he'd had the sprain, I do,

he might have found out that it was something."

Stenie did not choose to repeat the jests upon the "cockney's clumsiness," which had stung his pride to the quick.

"You must keep your poor foot up on a chair, and have it bandaged," suggested Diana.

"Nonsense; I hate molly-coddling, 'twill be all right soon," said Stenie, biting his lip with pain as he limped along.

The youth did not even thank Bertie on his reaching Aspen Hall for the assistance which he had given him. Stenie was thoroughly out of temper; he was angry with Warren, angry with himself, disposed to quarrel with everything and everybody around him. The only pleasant idea which remained to cheer him was that suggested by the prospect of dining with a duke. There was something that flattered his pride in this, and Stenie took more than usual pains with his toilette when the dressing-bell had sounded the time for preparation.

When his looking-glass had satisfied Stenie as to the smoothness of his hair, and the

fashion of his tie, and the style of his whole appearance, he painfully descended to the drawing-room. He found there only Lady Waters, who was surveying her own arrangements with a critical eye, altering the position of that album, changing the place of that vase, making all ready for the illustrious guest, who was then occupied in his dressing-room. Lady Waters at first hardly noticed Stephen, but on desiring him to ring the bell for the servant, she could not avoid seeing the difficulty with which her command was obeyed.

"What is the matter with your foot?" inquired the lady.

"Nothing,—a little strain," answered the youth.

"We can't have you limping about the room," said Lady Waters, who was in her heart not sorry for an excuse for getting rid of "the awkward slip of a lad." "You must see to that foot, and lay up, or you'll find a sprain a troublesome thing;" and on the footman's answering the bell, the lady, after sending some order to the housekeeper, added in her decided manner, "Lay the table only for four; Mr. Vane has hurt his foot, and will dine in

his own room, or in the little study if he prefer it."

There was no room for expostulation. Lady Waters made it clear enough to her young cousin that his company was not wanted, and with his spirit boiling with indignation and mortified pride, poor Stephen remounted the staircase step by step, and returned to his room. The idea of joining the children in the study was what he would not tolerate for a moment.

"All selfishness, worldliness, heartlessness!" he muttered to himself as he threw himself on his little sofa. "If I had broken my leg or my neck, what would that woman have cared when expecting a duke to dinner! Ugh! how one despises such cringing to rank."

Stenie's solitude was soon broken by a gentle tap at the door.

"Who's there?" he exclaimed, in a tone that resembled a growl.

"It is only I,—it's Di," said a soft voice, and the door was gently opened. "I told Vicars about your poor foot, and she has given me some nice cooling lotion."

"I don't want any of her quackery," ex-

claimed the impatient youth, "just take yourself off with your lotion, and don't come and plague me again."

The ungracious words were uttered in the irritation of pain and disappointment, and were repented of as soon as they were spoken. The flaxen-haired girl retreated at once, closing the door behind her. Stenie listened to the sound of her light step down the stairs, and wished that he could call back his sister. He reproached himself for rudeness and unkindness to the only being who had come near him with interest and affection. Very disagreeable was the consciousness that he had of late broken and despised those gentle ties of family love, which are never felt more dear than when the world looks coldly upon us. Stenie began to think of the Palace of Deceits, with its changing pictures, its polluted fountain, and the moral of the "childish tale" which he had scorned became painfully clear to his mind. There was more truth in it than he had chosen to own, much more than he liked to dwell on. He would turn his thoughts to something else; where was the sporting novel that had amused him on the previous evening?

How provoking, he had left it down-stairs! He would ring for one of the servants to bring it.

Stenie rang, and rang again, but no one answered his summons; a duke was dining in the house, who could have leisure to think of a lad laid up with a sprained ankle? Stenie grew hungry, but in that large household not one remembered his wants. Feasting was going on below, he might starve upstairs in his room! Stenie limped to the side of the fire-place once more, and pulled the bell so violently that snap went the wire! The lad flung himself again on the sofa in a passion.

Passion however soon cooled, as there was no object on which to vent it; and in that solitary room quiet reflection would come. Stenie was forced, as it were, to weigh the value of mere worldly acquaintance against that of affection earnest and true. How he had admired, and praised, and imitated Warren, how he had made it his ambition to follow in the steps of the young man of fortune; and whither had these steps now led him? whither were they likely to lead? Certainly not to true honour, not to true happiness even in

this world. They had been drawing Stephen deeper and deeper into the slough in which many a soul has been lost. Conscience was pressing upon the youth's mind; he could not but feel that he had of late offended and neglected his God. His lips had been stained with language which he would not have dared to utter in the presence of an earthly parent. He had made *a mock at sin*, and jested at things which should rather have roused his indignation and shame. He had put aside thoughts of religion as restraints on his proud wilful spirit. How had that Sabbath been spent? without worship in the house of prayer, without devotion in the closet. Must not an account be given of what he had done on that day?

Stenie could not endure such reflections. He started up from his sofa, and attempted to walk up and down, but this the pain in his ankle forbade. He went to his cigar-box, but found it empty; the youth had no resource but to return to his sofa again.

"How can any one tolerate confinement?" muttered Stenie. "It is so hateful to be shut up, with no companion but one's own thoughts.

Aunt Eva however does not seem to find it so irksome. She has been a prisoner for weeks, for months, and in pain too, sometimes sharp pain, with only the prospect of death before her, and yet she looks peaceful and serene! If I were in her place I am sure that such trials would drive me mad. Her thoughts must be very different from mine. After all, that happiness must be worth the having which is not destroyed by a slip of the foot, or the neglect of a worldly companion."

Weary of himself, and desirous to get some one to attend to him, Stenie, who had pulled off his boots to relieve his swelled ankle, with no covering to his feet but his socks, painfully again descended the staircase. The sound of Warren's laugh jarred on his ears, though it came softened by distance, and through the closed door. Stenie did not bend his steps towards the dining-room, he went straight to the little study, in which he expected to find his young brother, whom he intended to employ as a messenger. Before Stephen, however, laid his hand on the door-handle his attention was arrested by the murmur of voices within, evidently engaged in prayer. In that

worldly house, on that Sabbath whose holy rest almost every inmate of the hall had broken, two children were kneeling together, and pouring out their heart's desires to their Father in heaven. "Bless Stenie, and give him Thy grace," these were the only words which fell on the ear of the youth, for he instantly retired from the door. A few hours before Stephen might have mocked his brother and sister; now, though he would not join, he dared not disturb their devotions. Touched at being remembered by them in prayer, he was yet mortified at the nature of their petition, for his awakened conscience bore witness that what they had asked for he needed. Ever since he had entered Aspen Hall Stenie had not once prayed for himself. With a sense of disgust at his own past conduct, the youth limped up again to his room without making any attempt to find one of the servants; he felt too dull and sick at heart at that moment to care for his bodily wants.

There was but one book in Stephen's room, and that had lain untouched on his table since he had unpacked his box on his first arrival at the hall. It was his Bible, the gift of his

mother; her hand had written his name on the fly-leaf. Stephen opened it now as if intuitively, without any settled design of reading, but rather from the impulse to do something, anything rather than *think*. But the first words on which his eyes fell arrested his attention, as if they were indeed a message from his heavenly Father expressly addressed to himself. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*

Stephen sat for some time with his gaze fixed upon the open page. Faith had entered the Palace of Deceits, had laid her hand on the vain selfish youth, had whispered to him of danger. Would he listen to the voice of warning,—would he break from the bondage of sin,—would he seek for the grace which comes from above to enlighten his conscience, to strengthen his weakness, to guide his steps in safety from the path of the soul-destroyer?

CHAPTER XII.

STRAIGHT AND CROOKED.

THE duke slept that night at the hall, it being arranged that on the following morning he should accompany Lady Waters and her daughter to the archery meeting. The fête was to take place in the grounds of a mansion distant nearly twenty miles from the hall; it was therefore necessary to start soon after ten, and the luxurious breakfast was consequently placed upon the table at an earlier hour than usual.

What Bertie and Diana had seen of the duke had by no means removed the unfavourable impression made by reports of his character. Mean and insignificant in appearance, his face wore an expression in which even a child could read a sordid and selfish spirit. Both time and temper had left deep lines on

his brow, and the attempt to appear younger than he was, and to be more witty and amusing than nature had intended him to be, took away from the nobleman even the dignity of manner which might have naturally been expected from one of his rank.

Bertie and his sister were the first to enter the breakfast room. They did not venture to touch the viands which were spread out in luxurious profusion, though they surveyed them with curious attention. While awaiting the appearance of Lady Waters, the young Vanes chatted together on the subject of her guest.

"I should never have taken him for a duke," observed Diana; "I am sure that papa looks fifty times more like a nobleman than he!"

"Oh, one would never compare them together!" cried Bertie. "And yet," he added, "I'm sure that Lady Waters cares a great deal more for the duke, because he is a duke, than she would for the best and noblest man in the world who had not a title!"

"I think that it must be a fine thing to be great," observed Diana.

"I'd rather be rich," said Bertie. "There seems something empty about a mere name, but the chink-a-chink, there's no mistaking what one can get with that!" and the boy glanced merrily at the loaded table.

"Ah, but have we not been agreeing, Bertie, that some things, and those the very best things, are not to be had for money?"

"Yes," said Bertie, more gravely; "neither money nor titles can give us health, or peace, or family love, or real contentment. Neither money nor titles can make us happy. I thought that Cousin Eleanor looked sadder than ever yesterday evening."

"Just when the duke was praising her pictures, that seemed to be so very strange! I am always pleased when I am praised, and it would please me above all things," added Diana with a laugh, "to be praised and flattered by a duke!"

"Is there not a bit of vanity in that, Di?" said Bertie. "But folly's catching, I know, and there's such a deal of it here,—"

Diana clapped her hand suddenly on her brother's arm to stop him, and Bertie started, for at that moment Lady Waters herself

rustled into the room. There was a look of cold displeasure on her face, that made the Vanes feel their position most uncomfortable, even before the lady sternly said, fixing her eyes upon poor Bertie, who grew scarlet under their gaze, "I hope that you speak of no one under this roof?"

"Oh, no," half rose to the lips of Diana, who was almost as much frightened on account of her brother, as if the unpleasant question had been addressed to herself. But Bertie would not be surprised into falsehood; he pressed his lips closely together, and resolutely kept that silence which he knew would be taken for confession. It was a great relief to both the Vanes when the awkward pause was broken by a light rustling of silk, and brilliant in her new mauve dress, in floated Eleanor Waters.

This at once affected a diversion. Lady Waters turned to survey her stately daughter with more than accustomed interest and pride. Bertie was glad to shrink back again into his usual position of a quiet observer.

"So, Vicars has done her work well, and quickly too," observed the lady, looking with

a criticizing eye upon the elegant dress. "I doubt, however, the good taste of looping up that upper flounce with a rosette."

"I doubted it too," said Eleanor, glancing down, "but Vicars assures me that it is the latest fashion."

Diana squeezed the arm of her brother. "I think the rosette very pretty," she ventured to say aloud.

"Who asked your opinion?" said Lady Waters, turning round sharply as she spoke; "and how is it that you are not with your aunt, as you were always to be at this hour?"

Bertie and his sister knew not what to reply. The changed hours, the bustle in the hall, the grand breakfast prepared for the duke, had made them for the time quite forget their engagement at Mayflower Cottage. They were only too glad to remember it now, as an excuse for making their escape from society in which they felt that they were not welcome.

"And your brother will go with you, I suppose," said Lady Waters; "Ah, I forgot, he is lame, I will send up his breakfast to him."

"Oh, Bertie," exclaimed Diana, as soon as the two were on their way to the dwelling of their aunt, hastening over the meadow with rapid feet, for they knew that they were much later than usual; "I am so glad that Lady Waters did not ask *me* that question, I'm afraid that I should never have had courage to bear her look as you did; it made me quite shivery and cold, though it was not turned upon me."

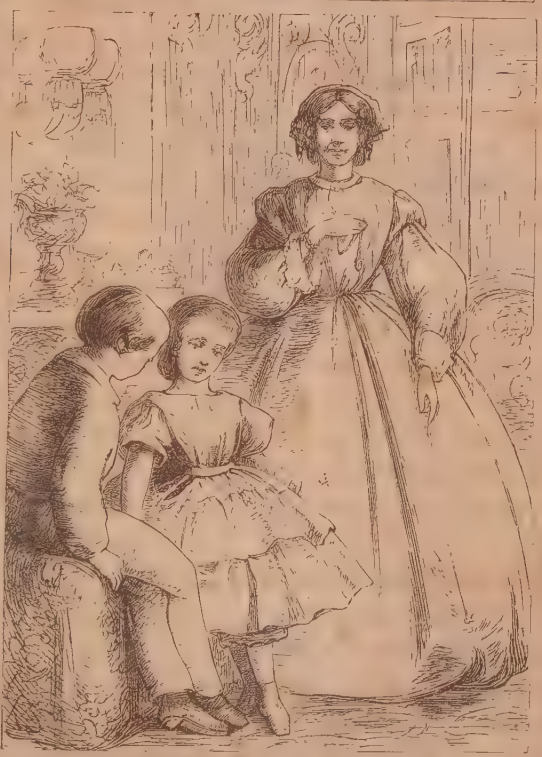
"I felt as if I could have bitten off my tongue for always getting me into such scrapes!" cried Bertie. "But I would not tell an untruth; the words darted into my mind, *Lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord.*"

"I'm afraid," began Diana, but she stopt short.

"I'm afraid too," said Bertie, guessing her thought, "that we've led poor Vicars into deceit. She puckered up the flounce, and popped on a rosette, just to cover the mark of the stain, and then tried to make Miss Eleanor believe that it was the tip-top of the fashion."

"How cleverly she managed," said Diana.

"I don't like such managing," replied



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Bertie, bluntly; "Papa used often to say that the straight way is always the shortest."

"I remember," said Diana, "that it was Self-indulgence who was ever taking the round-about road, that he might not get hurt by the thorns."

"Give me a brave spirit that's not afraid to look at a difficulty, and then go boldly through it!" cried Bertie.

"But suppose that one has not a bold spirit?" suggested Diana.

Bertie walked on for some minutes in silence, turning over the matter in his mind; and Diana had almost forgotten her own question, before her brother made reply. "I suppose that courage in the right, courage to tell the truth, would be given by grace; that must be the meaning of that favourite verse which I marked in my Bible, *The righteous is bold as a lion.*"

"St. Peter was afraid," observed Diana, "and that made him speak what was untrue."

"If Peter had watched and prayed as he was commanded to do," said Bertie, "I do believe that God would have given him more grace, and grace would have given him more

courage. He was *bold as a lion* in the end."

Nothing was said by either of the Vanes until they arrived at Mayflower Cottage. They were so late that Eva de Vere had almost ceased to expect them; the brown urn was still on the table, but the water was almost cold. Eva's welcome, however, was warm and kindly as ever, and everything was soon made comfortable and nice for the hungry young guests.

"Am I not to see Stenie?" she inquired.

"Oh, Stenie sprained his ankle yesterday," said Bertie; and he gave an account of the meeting in the field.

"And how is the poor ankle to-day?" asked Eva, with kindly concern.

"Really I don't know, I've not asked," replied Bertie; "now, don't look shocked, Aunt Eva; if any accident had happened to you, or to Di, I should have been sorry enough, and have done all that I could to serve you, but one can't feel the same for Stenie. If you only knew what airs he gives himself! If you only knew how he has treated us—me especially, since we came to Aspen Hall! Yesterday, he threatened to twist my ears

because I did not run at his call; and though he leant on me so hard that my shoulder ached for an hour afterwards, he never said so much as 'thank you' after we got to the house! I don't see why we should go fawning on him, when he chooses to thrust us away! If Stenie does not care for his brother and sister, let him try how he can do without us!"

"Ah, Bertie," said Eva, gently, "have you forgotten the words, *If ye love them that love you what thank have ye, do not publicans and sinners the same?* are we not commanded to love even our enemies?"

"It is not in nature," replied Bertie.

"No, it is not in nature, dear boy; the spirit of forgiveness and of kindness towards those who have done us wrong, is the special gift of God's grace.

"We did pray for Stenie last evening," said Diana.

"Follow up your prayers by acts of kindness, my love; if disappointed, persevere still. It is not all at once that sunshine ripens the crude, green fruit that hangs on the bough. With what patience have we to wait till, with

progress so slow that the keenest gaze cannot see it, gradually the fruit swells, the hard becomes soft, the sour changes to sweet, and the rosy tint tells us that smiling sunshine and gentle dews have done their work!"

A few minutes afterwards Eva de Vere resumed the thread of her story.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOLD A CURSE OR A BLESSING.

"I AM thankful that the mist is clearing off!" exclaimed Seele, as he found himself once more on the narrow path from which Self-indulgence had led him. Grieved as he was at the separation from his twin-brother, hope was busy whispering to the boy that the separation would not last long. Faith would again seek out Irrend, would rouse him to quit the Palace of Deceits! "Irrend is stronger and bolder than I," thought Seele; "his speed will be greater than mine; he will soon make up for lost time. Together shall we pass through the forest, together reach the bright land beyond!" And as Seele prayed again and again for his wandering brother, his golden cup filled with a sweet draught of joy; he drank, and his spirits were refreshed.

Brighter grew the sunlight, streaming in between the mossy trunks of the old gnarled oaks, and showing in more distinctness the holy words graven upon them. Seele pursued his way in peace; it almost seemed to the boy as if his temptations were over, and that there was now no danger of his ever wandering again!

Seele had walked for some distance when his attention was attracted by something glittering which lay in his path. Stooping down, he perceived that in a lump of clay was imbedded a bright little nugget of gold, which had caught the rays of the sun.

"What, gold here!" exclaimed Seele, with eager pleasure; "now I remember having often heard that gold is to be found in this soil! This lies directly in my path, so there can be no harm at all in taking it for my own!" He raised the clod and made an attempt to separate the gold from the clay, but found that it would be difficult to do so. "I will carry the whole lump with me," said Seele to himself, "until I can find some means of dividing the ore from the earth. See, yonder there is more gold! Surely I am in

the way to grow quite rich! I little thought when I had the resolution to turn my back upon Self-indulgence, how soon I should find my reward! But how shall I carry all this clay? I can take but little in my hands; would that I had been provided with a sack to bear with me the riches that I find!"

Necessity, it is said, is the mother of invention, and Seele soon found a way to supply the want of a sack. He took off his mantle, and seating himself on a mossy bank, he contrived in an ingenious manner so to fasten up the ends with some fine cord which he happened to have with him, that it answered all the purposes of a bag. The sack once made, the next thing was to fill it, and Seele set cheerfully to work, being careful at first to gather only on the straight narrow path through the wood. How difficult is it, however, to enter eagerly into any earthly pursuit, without allowing it at last to engross too much of our time and attention! Seele was necessarily delayed on his journey, not only by his search for the ore, but by the weight of the bag which he carried. Nor was this all, for the traveller soon saw larger and more tempting nuggets

lying a little way out of the path, and he could not bear to leave them behind. Seele's eyes were now so eagerly fixed on the ground, seeking for the earthly treasure, that he never once raised them, or he might have seen what would have put him on his guard. High seated amongst the thick branches of a yew-tree, was the thin wizened form of Covetousness, one of the most active servants of Sin, one of the most dangerous enemies of man. With a malicious grin on his sharp yellow features, the evil one was watching every movement of his unsuspecting victim below. Not by chance had these clay-imbedded nuggets of gold lain in the path of Seele; not by chance had the largest and heaviest been put beyond the reach of any one who would faithfully keep to the straight line of duty. As the fowler strews grain to lure the fluttering bird to his snare, so the hunter for souls had strewn gold to draw the feet of the unwary to a spot where Covetousness had dug a pit so deep, that many who had fallen into it had perished for ever. The pitfall was carefully covered over from sight, and brighter and thicker than in any other place lay the sparkling bits of gold on its surface.

In his eager, busy pursuit of wealth, nearer and nearer to the fatal spot drew the unsuspecting Seele. He heard not the smothered laugh of the evil being so near him, he saw not the sharp cruel eyes that were watching with greedy impatience.

"Ha! ha!" said Covetousness with a malicious sneer; "here is the pupil of Faith, here is the owner of Conscience, here is the enemy of Self-indulgence, bending under the weight of thick clay, fixing his eyes upon earth—dull earth; he will soon be like the thousands before him who have exchanged their souls for gain!" And clutching the branches with his bony hands, to steady himself in his seat, already the wicked servant of Sin exulted in his easy success.

But the stooping posture to which Seele had been unaccustomed, made him feel the weight of his golden cup; he could not breathe freely with it in his bosom. "There must be some evil near," thought Seele, "for Conscience distresses me sorely. I must examine and see where the danger lies hidden."

"He has his foot almost on the brink of the pitfall! Another step and he is in!" laughed the cruel enemy.

But before that step was taken the victim happily paused. Not upon the gilded bait, but upon Conscience was his gaze now fastened. Seele looked within and beheld the words, *Take heed and beware of Covetousness,* written as with letters of light. He raised his eyes, too long bent upon earth, he raised them with the upward glance of prayer, and started to behold a wizened yellow face grinning at him through the branches of the yew.

"Go on and prosper, my friend," croaked Covetousness, when he saw that his hiding-place was discovered. "There is gold—more gold—search and find!"

"I will not go one step farther out of the way!" exclaimed Seele, moving backwards as he spoke. "Well, well is it for me, thou traitor, that I have been warned in time of thy presence! Thou hast spread some snare for my feet; I will turn back at once to the straight narrow way."

Covetousness ground his teeth in vain wrath, when he saw his intended prey escaping from the toils so carefully prepared. One thing alone gave him cruel satisfaction.

"He will tread the straight narrow way,

will he?" muttered the enemy between his teeth. "Slow progress will he make, I trow, laden as he is with all that thick clay. Who can walk firmly and surely with such a burden to carry; the cares and riches of this world have weighed down many stronger than he."

And truly Seele proceeded with a slower step than when he had first parted company with Self-indulgence. Conscience indeed no longer oppressed him, and he could pray as he walked on alone; but still the burden which he bore naturally engaged much of his thought and attention. "When I have washed away the earthy particles," thought Seele, "I shall have a goodly supply of bright ore; pleasant and easy will it render my journey. There are so many uses for gold, it buys comfort, it buys pleasure, it buys power. How shall I so lay out mine as to get the very best return for my treasure?"

As Seele, proceeding at a slow pace, was indulging in these reflections, his ear caught a wailing cry, the distant sound of distress. Seele quickened his steps, and the cries became more distinct as he approached a spot where by the wayside appeared a miserable group.

There was a pale toil-worn father lying upon the ground, too feeble to lift up his head. Beside him knelt his weeping wife, with a wailing infant in her arms, while elder children, bare-headed and bare-footed, clustered around, vainly asking for that bread which the wretched parents could not supply.

"Whence come you?" asked the pitying Seele; "and why is that man so faint and ill, lying here on the earth?"

The woman looked up through her tears. "Oh! gentle stranger," she said, "we are stricken by sore misfortune! We lived for years in peace and safety in our home, not far from hence, and from morn to night, content though poor, we toiled for daily bread. But not long was our peace to last. It was in the dusk of evening that Sickness and Poverty, two cruel robbers, assailed my husband at once, as he was bearing to his home the fruits of his honest labour. One of them he might have withstood, but he was no match for them both. The robbers stript him of all, and left him, grievously hurt, to perish here by the wayside. All night my poor husband lay here, while I sadly waited and watched, and wondered what

caused his delay. There was no fire in my grate, no loaf on my board, he was bringing home what my children needed, and home he never returned. When morning came I searched for my husband, carrying my babe in my arms, and followed by my hungering lambs! . I have found him at last, but in what a state!" tears gushed from the wife's eyes as she spake; "how shall I support him back to our home; and when we reach it how shall I save my husband and children from dying of hunger!"

The salve of knowledge was still on the eyes of Seele, and he knew the woman's tale to be true. As he was revolving in his mind by what means assistance could be given to the family, he heard the sound of hoofs behind him. Turning round Seele perceived, emerging from the shadow of the trees, a man driving an ass laden with various provisions. When he came to the spot where the poor sufferer lay, the man paused for a moment to look, and then seemed about to pass on.

"Stay, my friend," cried Seele, laying his hand on the bridle of the ass, "there is want here, and you can relieve it, in a happy hour have you come. You bring with you food for

the hungry; and on your ass can this wounded man be carried back to his home."

"Why should I give my goods without hope of reward?" said the man, "or spend the strength of my beast of burden on that which will bring me nought? Let each take care of himself."

"Are not all men brethren?" pleaded Seele; "we too, like this suffering one, may some day be overtaken by Poverty or Sickness."

"The more need," said he with the ass, "that I should now speed on my way, while daylight lasts and the road is clear." And he raised the oaken stick in his hand to make his beast go forward.

The light of hope which had been kindled in the eyes of the mother faded away, and more bitter than before was the wail of her hungry children.

"Hold!" cried Seele, with his grasp still on the bridle; "if thou dost leave the man here he will die!"

"Who made him my charge more than thine? I see that thou art not empty-handed?" and the traveller glanced meaningly at the large heavy bag which Seele still bore on his shoulder.

"This," replied the youth, "holds but clay in which are some grains of gold ore."

"And gold can be turned into bread and medicine, and whatever nature requires," said the man, his covetousness gleaming in his eyes. "Sacrifice is the soul of charity, he who gives but words gives nothing. Let me have thy ore, O youth, and I will do even as thou hast required, give the food to those who need it, and my ass to him who cannot walk."

Seele hesitated, but only for a moment. He looked on the wasted frame of the labourer, he met the anxious glance of the wife, he heard the cry of the feeble babe, and his resolution was taken. Seele threw down his burden on the ground; he parted with his treasure for the joy of helping the poor and distressed.

Seele assisted to raise the wounded man, and place him gently upon the ass. With his own hands the youth then distributed food amongst the eager children; but he cared not to wait for thanks. Relieved of the weight which he had borne, Seele went joyfully on his way towards the Bright Land of his Father; it seemed to him as if he trod on air, or had wings to help him onward. How light was

the golden cup of Conscience, how sweeter than honey the draught which it contained, while a soft light gleamed on the words, *They cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed.* Yea, a hundred fold will each offering of Christian love be returned into the bosom of the giver.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEED AND FRUIT.

"NOW, Aunt Eva," cried Bertie, "does this part of your story mean that it is wicked to try to grow rich; that we ought never to wish to gather gold, or that if we do, we should make a point of getting rid of it as fast as we can?"

"I had a double object, dear boy," replied Eva, "in telling you of Seele's finding the ore. The first was to warn you against Covetousness, or *the lust of the eye;* and the second was to show you how gold may be so used as to bring a blessing to its possessor."

"Let's keep to one thing at once," said Bertie; "do you think money an evil thing, for to me it seems a very good thing."

Eva smiled at her nephew's manner of putting the question. "It is not money," she

replied "but *the love of money* which *is the root of all evil.* For this we have the warrant of Scripture."

"Surely there was no harm in Seele's picking up the gold when it lay in his path, more than in my father's receiving a salary in China."

"No, the harm was in his so fixing his eyes and heart on the gold that his affections were drawn towards earth, that his speed slackened, and his desires stooped. Seele thought so much of getting rich that he was drawn gradually out of the way, and unless he had attended to the warning of Conscience, he would have fallen into the pit of the enemy."

"Don't we hear in the Bible," said Diana, "of some who fell into that pit?"

"Many are the examples in Scripture of those whom Covetousness led to destruction. There was Balaam, a wise man and a prophet, who perished as the foe of God's people, because he loved the wages of iniquity."

"And Achan," suggested Diana, "who was stoned to death for taking and hiding the money and garment."

"And Demas, who forsook St. Paul," said Bertie.

"And the traitor Judas himself, the lost one," added his aunt.

"These are terrible examples," said Diana; "but it does not seem to me," she continued; "as if young people, like Bertie and me, are in much danger of getting covetous. Self-indulgence *is* a pleasant companion, it is very hard to give him up; but that horrid Covetousness, with his griping fingers and wrinkled face, it seems to me as if he only dug his pitfall for the old; and that little children run over it so lightly, that whatever else may be a snare, they never can fall into that."

"It is true, my love, that Covetousness is considered the especial temptation of age, but youth is not safe from its wiles. In some dispositions the desire of gain takes root far more readily than in others; if the least shoot of the baneful plant show itself in the heart, how we should be on the watch to prevent the weed from spreading, seeing that it is its nature to grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength, and at last entirely choke up all that is good within us."

"I have often longed to be rich," cried Bertie; "I have thought what a fine thing it

would be to have Fortunatus's purse that never was empty, however often the gold was taken from it. Fancy what a jolly life one would lead! I'd have horses to ride, fine strong hunters, like those Warren has in his stable, and I'd keep such a house, and such a table! Oh, for all that one says over and over again about riches not making us happy, I should like to be rich, tremendously rich! Is there any wickedness in that?"

"Is not Covetousness grinning down through the branches at Bertie?" laughed Diana.

"I think that he has his eye upon him, my love," replied Eva with a faint smile; "but Bertie will stand on his guard, and examine his conscience, and beware of the enemy's pit. Ah! Bertie, when we remember that the *thought* is the parent of the *deed*, and see to how many crimes the *lust of the eye* leads millions of our fellow-creatures, we shall not wonder that in God's Commandments *Thou shalt not covet* is found, as well as *Thou shalt do no murder.*"

"I'm sure that mere coveting is not thought much harm of in the world," said Bertie.

"It is *of the world*," replied Eva, "and as

long as it lies buried in the heart, as seed lies buried in the earth, it is little noticed, and little dreaded. But trace for a moment what deadly fruits are evermore springing from that seed. There is the Sabbath-breaker, selling or buying, or labouring hard on that day which God has commanded us to hallow. Whence comes his sin? from *the love of money.* There is the shop-keeper, telling falsehoods to customers, mixing bad with good, setting a wrong value on the articles which he sells! Whence comes his fraud? from *the love of money!* There is the gambler, ruining his family, losing his character, risking his soul. Whence comes his misery? from *the love of money!* There is the thief, robbing his neighbour, breaking the laws of his country, bringing disgrace and misery upon himself; whence comes his dishonesty? from *the love of money!* There is the murderer—"

"Oh! stop, aunt, stop;" exclaimed Bertie; "there is not the least danger that I should ever be drawn into any of those horrible sins."

"God forbid," said Eva earnestly; "but be assured, dear Bertie, that in the present day when Mammon—the love of money, has his

golden idol set up not only in market-places and exchanges, but even in the peaceful homes of our land, there is much need of the Scripture warning, *They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*"

"And what is the best cure for a a covetous temper?" asked Bertie.

"One of the best cures is to receive money as a charge *from* God, to be used *for* God; and this brings me to the second lesson which I wished to impart. We are not likely to set our hearts too fondly upon that which we do not regard as our own, that for which we feel that we must one day give an account. If we are rich, we are stewards for God."

"You make me think of the parable of the Talents," said Diana.

"That parable was in my own mind when I spoke. He who had received five, was expected to do more with these five, than he who had received but one; and sore would have been his punishment if, in idleness or self-indulgence, he had buried the treasure of his lord."

"And you wished to teach us by your story," said Bertie, "that to help the poor and needy is the very best use to which we can put our treasure."

"It is laying it out for eternity, dear boy; it is placing it where *neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal. He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord, and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.*"

"I remember the old epitaph over a grave," observed Bertie; "I did not see its meaning at first, but the more I think over it, the more I like it.

"What I spent—I had.
"What I kept—I lost.
"What I gave—I have!"

"But let us never forget," said Eva faintly, "that true charity comes of God's grace, that it springs from love to the Saviour, and is accepted only for His sake. On His merits alone must we rest, and then shall we find it our delight to spend and be spent for Him."

Eva closed her eyes as she spoke, and a spasm of pain passed across her pale face. The

conversation, short as it had been, had quite exhausted her strength, and her delicate features looked almost as white as the pillow on which she rested.

"Oh, Aunt Eva, you are very ill!" exclaimed Bertie in alarm.

Eva opened her eyes and smiled, but even the patient smile told of exquisite suffering. Diana hastily rose, and with salts and *eau-de-cologne* tried to revive her aunt; while Bertie chafed her cold hands, and pressed them to his own warm cheek and lips to bring back the circulation.

"I am better now," said Eva feebly, "the spasm has passed, the pain is over.

"Oh, that pain must be terrible!" exclaimed Diana. "Why does God let you suffer so much?"

"In love, in wisdom," murmured the gentle invalid;" and the trial is but for a little while; there is no pain, no sorrow in heaven."

"But we could never bear to part with you —never!" cried Diana, bursting into tears.

"Diana," said Bertie, with a reproving look, "you must not agitate Aunt, you will hurt her, you will make her feel worse. I am afraid that our coming here has been too much for

her already," and he glanced anxiously at Eva de Vere.

"Nay, I enjoy seeing you, talking with you, my beloved ones; these are my golden hours," said the sufferer; "but now we must part for to-day."

"Might I not stay with you, and nurse you?" cried Diana.

Eva gently shook her head. "I shall expect you to-morrow," she whispered; "I wish that Stenie could come with you, give him my love and my blessing!"

Bertie and Diana quitted Mayflower Cottage with heavy hearts; but hope is buoyant with the young, and sorrow, like snow in March, is never suffered to lie long. Each tried to persuade the other that their aunt would recover, though slowly; they had seen her worse before, — and sometimes she looked so bright, that she could not be so very, very ill. Neither Bertie nor Diana had ever seen death, and they were unable to realize the idea that one so beloved could be taken from them. Their thoughts were further diverted from the painful subject of the sufferings of their aunt by their passing

the cottage of old Betty, and they recurred to the pleasant visit which they had paid to her on the preceding day.

"Do you remember, Bertie," said Diana, "that Mrs. Gray told me that I ought to make something to give to my cousin, Lady Waters, to show her that I was obliged to her for kindly asking us to pay her a visit."

"I remember," replied Bertie, "for I thought at the time that I could make nothing but a bow. I went with you when you bought the wool for knitting a pair of warm cuffs."

"Yes, and you advised me to get black wool, because Lady Waters is a widow, and you thought that it would suit her best."

"Ah," cried Bertie with a little laugh, "we had not seen then her purple silk dress, nor her dashing bonnet with the yellow bird-of-paradise plume!"

"I have not cared to finish the cuffs, because I fancied that Lady Waters would not care to wear them."

Bertie shook his head with a meaning smile; the coarse black cuffs would be little to the taste of the fashionable lady of Aspen Hall.

"Now you know, Bertie dear," continued Diana, "though they might not suit Lady Waters, they might suit good Betty Miller; and I was thinking that as they are nearly ready, I would just finish them off, and we would carry them to the good old woman,—our *own* old woman, to-morrow!"

"That's a capital thought!" cried Bertie; "I wish that I had something to give her too. I must not take to coveting after all that we've been hearing, but I'd give anything to have enough to buy that fine warm plaid that I saw hanging up in a shop window when I was in the town last Friday."

CHAPTER XV.

A SHARP TEST.

"THERE go Bertie and Diana on their way to Mayflower Cottage," said Stenie to himself, as he looked forth from his window on that bright October morning. His ankle was as much swollen as it had been on the previous day, and although able to walk, he could only do so with a painful limp, which served as a disagreeable reminder of his shooting excursion with Warren. "There they go, to sit by Aunt Eva's couch, and listen to her stories about faith, and prayer, and grace, the vanities of this world, and the happiness of the next. It is all well enough for women and children!" Stenie tried to whistle away the uncomfortable thoughts which would arise in his mind, but the words, *The world passeth away and the lust thereof,*

remained fixed like an arrow in his mind. Stephen was vainly seeking to persuade himself, that to give himself up to the passing trifles of life, its amusements, its sports, its follies, was more manly than to direct the energies of the soul towards those eternal truths which abide for ever. Stephen hated the idea of being influenced,—led,—even if it were for his own good, and did not choose to see that he himself had been as wax in the hands of Warren. He who is not *led* by conscience, is likely to be *driven* by passion; he who is not *influenced* by religion, is *enslaved* by the power of sin.

"I should not care, after all, to go on *always* as I have been going on of late," thought Stephen, as the secret struggle between good and evil continued in his mind; "I've a notion that doing just what pleases one's fancy, and breaking through all restraints is not the way to get a light heart. There's a sort of feeling that one will have to pay for it all in the end. But I can't change *here*, that's plain. One must do at Rome like the Romans. Warren burst out laughing yesterday when he saw me hesitate for a moment

when he proposed that we should go out shooting together. He mockingly asked me if I were afraid lest my saintly aunt should know that I was out, instead of going to church, like a good little boy! I can't stand that sort of thing. It's all well enough for Bertie," (Stenie tried hard to despise his brother), "to be tied to a woman's apron-strings. I'm not of an age or temper for that,—I can choose my own path for myself!"

Stephen limped down stairs as soon as he had finished his breakfast, and went out into the sunshine. He threw himself on a bench near the portico of the hall, to see the party set out for the archery meeting, and have a sight of the duke.

"That's a poor apology for a nobleman," said Stephen to himself, as he watched the peer handing the ladies into the carriage; "one would take him for an attorney, soured with want of practice, for he has a spice of temper in him, or I'm very much mistaken. But Lady Waters looks as proud in his company as a turkey-cock ruffling out its plumes! How one does laugh at such folly!" and

Stephen smiled at the pride of another, as if he had none of his own!

"Warren doesn't go with them,—he's out riding; I wish that this horrid sprain would not tie me so by the foot, and on a glorious morning like this, when a gallop across country would have been such a delight! I've not a single cigar left to while away the wretched dull hours; one might as well be back in stupid old London with the Grays."

Tedious appeared to Stenie the time of the absence of Bertie and Diana, as he remained on his bench near the portico, watching the gardeners at work, biting the head of his cane, or listlessly drawing with it the letters of his own name on the gravel before him. Stephen was not happy to be thus left alone with himself; he was not in a mood for light reading, and what he had read in his Bible had left an uncomfortable impression on his mind, which he tried in vain to rub of. He was glad when he saw his brother and sister coming across the park, though Stenie would have scorned to own that he cared for their society at all.

As soon as Diana had passed through the

little iron gate which divided the park from the drive, she ran up to the bench where her brother was sitting.

"Good morning, Stenie dear; I hope that your poor foot is better; I am sorry that I did not ask after it before I went out this morning."

The manner of the little girl was so frank and kind, and Stephen felt that he had so little deserved her sympathy after rejecting it so rudely, that his irritable spirit was softened. He answered his sister more graciously than he had done on the preceding evening.

"And Aunt Eva was so sorry to hear of your sprain. She wishes so much to see you."

"How is my aunt?" asked Stephen.

Both Bertie and Diana looked grave at the question, and gave their brother an account of the distressing symptoms which they had witnessed. Stephen's conscience smote him, for he felt that he had neglected her of whose critical state he was far more aware than were his younger companions.

"I would go and see my aunt," said the youth, "but I can't walk from this plaguey sprain."

"You might drive," suggested Diana; "the road is a little longer, but that, of course, would not matter. You might ask Lady Waters if her carriage—"

"I shall do no such thing," said Stenie peevishly; "I don't believe that Lady Waters' grand carriage has ever stopped at Mayflower Cottage,—and I'll never ask a favour from her."

"I daresay that she might not like it, at least just now, when her head is so full of the duke," said Bertie. "But I know how you could manage. There's good-natured Hall,—the man at the lodge,—he keeps a little donkey-chair for his poor old wife—"

"A donkey-chair!" exclaimed the indignant Stephen; "do you think that I would be wheeled about in a basket like a crippled old woman!"

The idea was to Stenie all the more intolerable from contrast, for at that moment Warren, mounted on a splendid bay hunter, came at a gallop up the drive. He reined up suddenly in front of the group, and the beautiful creature which he rode stood pawing the ground, with red expanded nostril, "glancing

eye and quivering ear," as if impatient again to bound onward!

"Oh, what a beauty he is," exclaimed Bertie, coming forward to pat the glossy shoulder of the hunter, "he beats Lightfoot out and out!"

"Ah, weren't you the young sprig that wanted to mount Lightfoot?" asked Warren, who had heard of Bertie's daring proposal to Eleanor.

"I should rather ride Chester," said Bertie, stroking the restless creature as he spoke.

Warren burst out into his coarse laugh. "I'll bet you a sovereign to a crooked sixpence," he cried, "that you dare not ride Chester round that field!"

"I dare, I can, I will!" cried Bertie with eager delight.

"You'll take the bet then, you'll cry 'done!'" laughed Warren.

"I'll ride the horse, but I can't bet," replied Bertie.

"He has not a sixpence, not even a crooked one to bet with," cried Stenie, who was mightily amused; "never mind, Bertie, I'll lend you the sixpence; I want to see a monkey on horseback!"

"Well, there's a handsome offer," exclaimed Warren, "but you don't seem quite so eager for the ride! Is your courage oozing out a little, my chick?" and by a skilful movement of his heel, the rider made his horse caper.

"It's not that," said Bertie bluntly; "but I once promised mamma never to bet."

Warren gave a contemptuous whistle.

"Let me have the ride without the betting," continued the boy, who was very eager to mount.

"My fine fellow," said Warren with a jeer, "you shan't play off your humbug on me; I'm not the man to stand nonsense, Your mother's in China—or Jericho—and if she were here you are not to be dandled like a baby on her lap. If you'll bet, you shall ride; if not, never shall you put your foot into the stirrup of any animal of mine!"

Bertie was tempted, perplexed; he looked at his brother as if for counsel; Stenie laughingly drew out the sixpence. Warren saw the hesitation of the boy, and felt the same amusement in breaking down his resolution and conquering his scruples, that was his when setting his dog upon some little creature that was ready to show fight. Warren had experi-

enced no difficulty in leading Stenie whither he would, and therefore regarded him simply with contempt; but he saw that the younger brother was of different mettle from the elder, and therefore took some pleasure in bending the boy to his will.

"Look you here, younker," cried Warren, pulling out from his waistcoat pocket a bright yellow sovereign, "it's not every day, I can tell you, that you'll have such odds in your favour!"

Bertie looked at the money with gleaming eyes; he had never in the whole course of his life possessed such a piece of gold, and the natural love of acquiring, which was a part of his disposition, was not a little roused by the sight. It was not merely that ambition impelled him to mount the hunter and then show how well he could ride, that pride shrank from the charge of fear; the money itself, to be so easily won, was a strong temptation to the boy. Rapidly through his mind passed a throng of wishes that might be gratified by the gold, not all of a selfish nature. The shawl for the cottager, the charms for Diana, some token of love for his suffering aunt, all might be his, and at what price? that of breaking one pro-

mise, of staking one silver sixpence. Stenie was astonished at his brother's hesitation; little Diana was alarmed. Perhaps with the loving girl fear lest Bertie should risk his neck by riding a spirited horse, was even stronger than her fear of his sinning by breaking his mother's command; both fears combined to make her throw the weight of her influence into the trembling scale of duty. Running up to Bertie, Diana laid her hand upon his arm, and whispered in eager accents, "Oh, keep back—'tis the pitfall—the pitfall!"

These few words brought before Bertie the countenance of a pale sufferer, wasted by illness, yet bright with the light of heaven; it was *her* warning, not Diana's, that seemed to sound in his ear.

"I will not bet!" said the boy.

"Come now, I'll make the sovereign *two*," persisted Warren, who, stirred by opposition, had resolved "to make the young dog yield."

Diana squeezed her brother's arm very hard. Bertie's face was very much flushed; he felt it difficult to stand his ground; but he thought of Covetousness peering through the boughs, he thought of what Scripture says

of the love of money, a prayer for help was darted from his soul, and resolutely he made his reply, "I will not bet for anything that you can give me!"

Warren looked angry, for he was provoked at being baffled by one so young. "You're a coward," he exclaimed, "you know that you are only making a beggarly excuse because you dare not ride my hunter!"

"I'd ride him this minute," cried Bertie, if—"

"Oh, no conditions for me!" exclaimed Warren; "you're the most obdurate puppy that ever I met in my life!" and giving an angry switch of his riding-whip to Chester, as if to vent his ill-humour on the horse, he was soon borne by the noble animal out of the sight of the Vanes.

"Well, Bertie, you are a resolute chap!" exclaimed Stephen, forced into admiration by a firmness which he did not himself possess. "How could you hold out so long?"

"I thought of Aunt Eva and her story," said Bertie; and then turning away and addressing himself to Diana, he continued, "but it was very hard to have them all three upon me at once."

"All three—what do you mean!" asked the little girl in surprise.

"Don't you see, Di, Self-indulgence, Covetousness, and Pride, all trying to pull me down! I longed, oh, I did so long for a ride, it would have been such a pleasure to have had a scamper on Chester! And then the money, two whole pounds, only think what a deal could be done with so much! And it was so worrying to one's pride to be twitted for cowardice, when one was not frightened one bit!"

"I was afraid you would have given way," said Diana.

"And so you came to the rescue, like a faithful little friend as you are," cried Bertie, patting the rosy cheek of his sister. "What a pity it was that Seele and Irrend didn't keep together in the wood! It's such a mighty help to have some one to remind one of duty, when one is tempted to wander from the way."

"You keep your golden cup much brighter than I do," said Diana; "I think that you are Seele, and I am Irrend. I am so fond, so very fond of pleasure, that if it were not for

you, I should always be going back to the Palace of Deceits."

"I don't think you in the least like Irrend," cried Bertie; "it was not you, it was I who threw away money on sweeties; it was not I, it was you who helped Betty Miller—"

"Oh, that reminds me," interrupted Diana, "that I have those mittens to finish! Do just come and read to me, Bertie, like a dear old boy as you are, and we'll have them all ready for to-morrow!"

Stephen had not overheard much of the preceding conversation, which was not intended for his ear; but Bertie, under his late little trial, had been giving an unintentional, humiliating lesson to the proud heart of his elder brother. Stephen could not avoid contrasting his own weakness with the strength of another; he could not help remembering the prayer in the study, and connecting cause with effect. Bertie would not have understood the meaning of the expression "unconscious influence," but it is what we all exercise, whether we will it or not, over those with whom we are brought into contact. We more often know the time by glancing at the silent

hand of a clock, than by hearing it strike the hours; so those around often learn more from what they see of our conduct, than from what they hear of our opinions. Bertie could never have convinced his brother of the use of prayer or the value of grace; but Stephen felt that the boy possessed a source of strength which he never had made his own. The preceding evening had shown Stephen something of the vanity of worldly pursuits; this day, while watching principle brought to the test of trial, the youth had unconsciously caught a glimpse of the mirror concealed in Eva's silver casket.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STORM.

THE short October day had drawn to a close, and the dimness of twilight had fallen around, ere the sound of wheels on the carriage-drive told of the return of Lady Waters and her daughter.

"Here they are!" cried Bertie, who was sitting with his sister in the little study as the handsome vehicle rolled past the window. "Will they bring back the Duke of Drayton?"

"No," replied Diana; "Vicars told me that he was only going to the archery-meeting. Shall we run to meet Lady Waters and Eleanor?" she continued, laying down the cuff which she had just finished knitting.

"I hear the lady's voice in the hall, and it sounds very angry," said Bertie.

"And there's the bell for Vicars, and rung so loud!" exclaimed Diana. "Oh, dear, dear, if it should be anything about that unlucky flounce!"

Both the Vanes ran out into the large vaulted hall, in which the gas-lamp had already been lighted. Stephen came out from another apartment just in time to join them.

"Such deceit, such assurance!" were the angry words from the lips of Eleanor which fell first on the ears of the Vanes.

"Oh, Bertie," whispered Diana nervously, "look how she's holding up the flounce with her hand! What can have become of the rosette?"

"I'm sure the impudent frauds that one meets with in life!" exclaimed Lady Waters, as she swept into the dining-room, followed by her daughter and the Vanes. "The insolence, the ingratitude of servants!"

"Would you believe it," said Eleanor, condescending to address Diana; "one of the archer's bows happened to catch in my rosette and tore it off, pulling the flounce partly out of the gathers. I went with mamma into the

tent to set matters to rights, and discovered what I certainly had never been intended to see, that that part of the flounce itself was all wrinkled and stained!"

"And that the rosette had evidently been put for nothing but to hide it!" exclaimed the indignant Lady Waters. "The deceitful creature shall have warning directly!" and she turned her angry eyes upon the unhappy maid, who, in tremulous haste, had just answered the summons of the bell.

"Don't turn away Vicars, it was I who did the mischief, it was I who spoiled the flounce!" exclaimed Bertie. Diana's heart beat fast, but she had not the courage to speak.

"You!" exclaimed the two ladies in a breath, and Eleanor continued, arching her dark eyebrows with a look of haughty surprise, "how had *you* anything to do with a silk dress of mine?"

"I'm in for it!" thought poor Bertie; "I only wish that I'd spoken out at the first! The truth is," he said aloud with an effort, "that I threw some fish and fish-sauce over it, quite by accident of course, and Vicars wishing to hide—"

"How had you anything to do with a silk dress of mine?" repeated Eleanor, in a more elevated tone of inquiry.

"Dear little Di kindly wished to help Vicars with her long piece of work, and was running the flounce in the study," said Bertie, anxious to shield his sister as much as he could from blame; "I took some of the good things as they were carried out of the dining-room, and my clumsy awkwardness with the fish did all the mischief!"

"Pretty doings!" exclaimed Lady Waters; "pretty doings!" she repeated in accents of high indignation; "such a tissue of gluttony, fraud, and deceit, I never thought to find in my house! You quit my service at once," she said to the maid, who stood silently wringing her hand.

"Oh, don't send Vicars away, it was our fault!" exclaimed Diana, bursting into tears.

"Certainly you and your brother are in fault, very grievously in fault," said the lady, with a little scornful toss of her paradise plume. "The manner in which you have conducted yourselves says very little for the nature of the education which you have been

receiving, or the effect of the instructions of Miss de Vere." There was bitterness in the tone of Lady Waters, as she mentioned the name of Eva. "I have no satisfaction in prolonging the visit of those whose principles seem to have been so sadly neglected; it is better upon all accounts that you should soon return to London; you could not, I am sure, feel comfortable here after all that has occurred. I shall write to Mrs. Gray to give her notice of your speedy return. Let's see, to-day is Monday, but it is past the post-hour; I shall desire her to send some one to meet you at the station on Thursday afternoon."

Bertie and Diana were so much amazed by the storm of indignation which they had roused, and the sudden, most unexpected announcement that their visit was so soon to end, that they were for several moments unable to utter a word. The boy was the first to speak.

"Perhaps we had better go home," he said, "but will you not forgive poor Vicars?"

"I never forgive deceit," replied the lady, sharply, and the paradise-plume in her bonnet

seemed to quiver with indignation. "Vicars did wrong, very wrong, in trusting the silk into the hands of a child, but *that* might have been overlooked; her attempt to deceive her mistress is an offence beyond forgiveness." And with the stern air of a judge pronouncing sentence on a culprit, Lady Waters waved poor Vicars out of her presence, and then, after saying a few words to her daughter, herself quitted the room.

"Oh, Cousin Eleanor!" exclaimed Diana, turning towards the younger lady with an air of entreaty.

A little curiosity made Eleanor pause. "What could have induced you to demean yourself by doing the work of a servant?"

Poor Diana hesitated and stammered; but she had just received a severe lesson on failing in candour, and she had resolved, by God's help, always to speak the plain truth. In a scarcely audible voice she replied, "I did not want Vicars to work upon Sunday."

"Oh," said Miss Waters, coldly; what a sneer was expressed in that "oh!" "Doubtless your very good aunt has been teaching you that it is wicked to tie your shoe

upon Sunday, but that there is no harm upon Monday in joining in a clever little piece of deceit!"

Bertie fired up at the taunt. "My Aunt Eva never teaches us anything but what is right," he exclaimed, "no one hates deceit more than she!"

Eleanor's only answer was a provoking smile, as she left the room to change her dress in her own apartment.

"Oh, what a scrape we're in, what a horrid scrape!" exclaimed Bertie, ready to tear his hair with vexation.

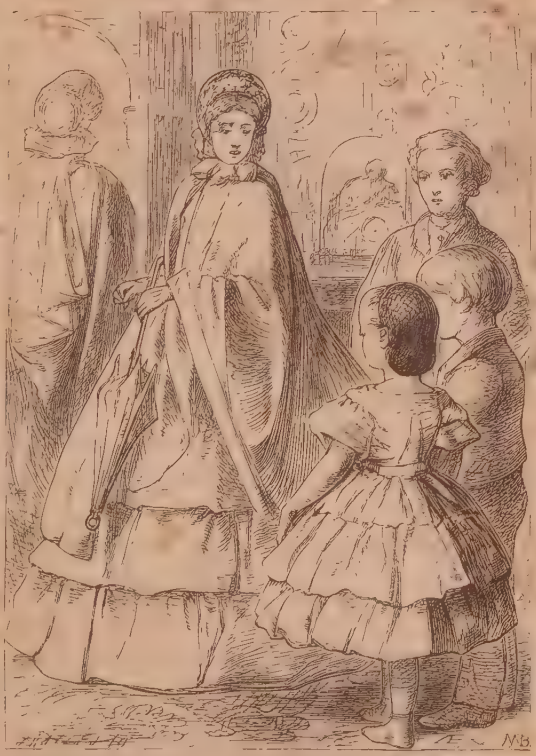
"To leave Aspen Hall on Thursday, and give up our visits to the poor, good old widow!" cried Diana, the tears gushing from her eyes.

"And then poor Vicars, sent off in disgrace!"

"And Aunt Eva, oh, what will she say, and she seemed so poorly this morning!"

"Stenie, you'll go to Mayflower Cottage, won't you, when we've left?" said Bertie to his elder brother, who had been a silent but interested spectator.

"I shall not stay here," replied Stephen, in



BERTIE AND DIANA IN TROUBLE.

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a quiet, decided manner, so different from his usual affectation of style, that Bertie looked up into his face with surprise. "You need not worry yourselves so," continued Stenie, "about that nonsensical flounce; it's my belief that ever since that duke's coming, Lady Waters has wanted *us* out of the way, and that she has merely seized the first opportunity for shortening our visit to the hall. It is well that we should go upon Thursday, and perhaps it would have been well if,—" Stephen did not finish the sentence, but there was self-reproach in the little sigh with which it was broken short.

"Well, Stenie!" cried Bertie, "it is some comfort that you are not down upon us too!"

"We must tell all to Aunt Eva," said Diana; "I wish that we had asked her advice from the first, but then I was afraid lest she should tell us to confess the whole truth to Eleanor. It would have been much better every way if we had done so at once."

"I must get to Mayflower Cottage to-morrow," said Stephen, "as our time here is cut so short."

"But your poor ankle?" suggested Diana.

"I think that I could manage to walk as far as the lodge, and then—" Stephen coughed to cover a little embarrassment, "and then I daresay that Hall would let me have the chair for a trifle." The youth could not yet bend his pride so far as to mention the word "donkey."

"Di," said Bertie to his sister, as they returned to their little study, "I think that wonders never will cease! Stenie was so cross with us yesterday, so savage about his foot, and to-day, did you ever see such a change? He seemed to think it rather a good thing that we should leave Aspen Hall; and I do think," Bertie lowered his voice, "that it is a good thing for *him*."

"But still it is so dreadfully vexing!" cried Diana. "I hope that Lady Waters won't be writing about us to papa. And then only think of poor Vicars losing her place!"

"God can make good come out of evil even to her," observed Bertie Vane. "Let us pray that she may have grace, and then she will have comfort in trouble, and, as Aunt Eva

would say, all things must work together for her good. Cheer up, dear Di; matters might be worse! Remember my favourite lines,—

"All will be right,
Look to the light,
Morning is ever the daughter of night;
All that was black will be all that is bright!"

CHAPTER XVII.

PRIDE.

BERTIE VANE ran over early on the Tuesday morning to the lodge of Hall the porter, just to make sure, as he said to himself, that there should be no difficulty about the chair. On his return he found Stephen giving an order to one of the servants.

"If you are going to the town to-day, Thomas, I shall want you to purchase for me a box of cigars, you know where Mr. Waters buys his, I must have the same kind that he smokes. And stay, there was something else, you will go on to Tomkins the shoemaker, and get me the pair of worked slippers with foxes' heads on the front, which you will see in the window."

"There's self-indulgence with a vengeance!"

thought Bertie; "that's the way in which Stenie's birthday sovereign is to go! Well, I'm not the one to judge him, I must remember the pastry-cook's shop!"

The walk to Mayflower Cottage was considerably lengthened by the necessity of Stenie in his chair going round by the road; but Bertie and Diana assured him that it made a pleasant change, and that they should have all the better appetite for their breakfast. Stephen took his little sister in the chair beside him for part of the distance, and the grateful manner in which this small act of kindness was received, made the youth feel ashamed at having so seldom done anything to give pleasure to another. "Kindness from Bertie comes as a matter of course," thought Stephen, "but Di is suprised to see me care for any one but myself!"

The two younger Vanes were pleased to find their aunt looking better, her eyes almost as bright, and her voice as clear as ever; but Stephen who had not seen her for three days was struck by a change in her appearance. The violet tint on the lip and the cheek seemed to him like a mark left by the touch of Death's

fingers, and he reproached himself for his neglect of one whose departure he felt must be near.

Eva welcomed her eldest nephew with peculiar pleasure, and sent Diana to bring from her little stores a valuable ointment, which, as she hoped, would soon remove the effects of his sprain. Stephen received it more graciously than he had done the lotion prescribed by Vicars. Eva could not but see that the youth's manner was softened and subdued, and with joyful hope she silently lifted up her heart in thanksgiving and prayer for her nephew.

The conversation at breakfast was animated and interesting. Bertie and Diana gave a full account to Eva of all that had passed in regard to the flounce, and while their aunt regretted the want of perfect openness which they at first had shown, there was much in what had happened that gave her lively pleasure. The kind thought of helping the maid, the self-denial involved in carrying the plan into effect, were gratifying proofs to Eva that the truths which she had tried to instil had not been received in vain; while it was

the greatest relief to her mind, precarious as she felt her own state to be, to know that her sister's family would be removed from the temptations of Aspen Hall. So strong was this feeling that it overcame even the pang which the invalid suffered from the thought that the parting hour was so near. "God knows my weakness and helplessness," such was the lady's reflections, "and is Himself taking the simplest means of saving those beloved ones from the evil influences which must surround them here."

"Now, aunt, for your story!" exclaimed Bertie, as soon as the breakfast was cleared away.

It was some effort to Eva to proceed with her little allegory in the presence of Stephen, but he set her at ease by taking out his pencil and asking permission to take a sketch of her as she lay on the sofa, to send to his mother in China. It was with a heavy heart that Stephen drew the outline of these fair and delicate features that seemed already scarcely to belong to the things of earth—

> "With something faint and fragile in the whole,
> As if 'twere but a lamp to hold the soul."

"She wants nothing but the wings to look

like an angel already," thought Stephen as he gazed on her face.

CONTINUATION OF EVA'S STORY.

It is now time to return to Irrend, whom we left a captive in the Palace of Deceits. All its pleasures were again around him, but his power to enjoy seemed gone. The salve of knowledge had been once on his eyes; he had once listened to the voice of Faith, he had once received the message from his Father,—and though he might be misled and enslaved, he could never again be utterly deceived. Conscience lay like a heavy load at his heart, and he knew not how to relieve himself of the weight. In vain Self-indulgence laughed and sung in his presence,—in vain he painted new pictures to delight,—in vain he bade Irrend quench his thirst at the Fountain of Pleasure. Irrend drank—eagerly drank, but his thirst was never relieved. Low fever was in his veins; bitterly in his heart he envied his brother, free from the slavery of Sin,—for Irrend remembered the coming fate of which Faith had so earnestly warned him.

"The victim will be making some second

attempt to break through our toils," said Self-indulgence one morning to Pride.

This Pride was the third of the servants of Sin, and though perhaps the most dangerous of them all, was altogether unlike his companions. Self-indulgence covered his designs with an air of easy good-humour, which suited his coarse and sensual appearance; Covetousness, with his wizened face, his crouching form, and his stealthy step, had never been attractive to Irrend, who had always treated him with contempt. Pride, dark in complexion, was of lofty stature and commanding mien, spoke in a tone of authority, and often condemned with haughty scorn both Covetousness and Self-indulgence. He was almost constantly at Irrend's side, and had acquired considerable influence over the mind of the hapless youth.

"He might break through *your* toils," was the reply of Pride to Self-indulgence, "but mine are more subtle and strong. I mix my poisoned Flattery with everything that he tastes, nay, he draws it in with the very air that he breathes."

"And what effect will it work?" asked Self-indulgence.

"Know you not?" said the servant of Sin, "'twill be like a crust of ice round his heart; 'twill be like a clog of lead on his feet; it will gradually take from him all power or wish to flee from the coming destruction!"

"He is certainly sick well-nigh unto death," said Self-indulgence, with a cruel smile, "but I doubt if he be aware of his state."

"It is my care to keep him from such knowledge," replied Pride. "Have I not enchanted every mirror, so that he sees in each the reflection of health and beauty to remove the misgivings that arise? I am always persuading him that he is well, and safe, and happy, and that it is his own inclination alone that keeps him here in the Palace of Deceits. I talk to Irrend of his strength till I almost convince him that he is strong; and he knows not that he has no power in himself to walk ten paces through the Forest of Temptations. I tell Irrend of his wisdom till he half believes that he is wise! —ha! ha! of all the fools who linger in this Palace, a *proud* fool is the strangest to behold."

"Your arts are deep," cried Self-indulgence;

"enough, so that the victim be but enslaved and destroyed, it matters little to our master whether it be through your influence or mine."

The unhappy Irrend was indeed in a state of danger, and yet was ignorant of his peril. But the merciless enemy who, under cover of friendship, was laying such a snare for his soul, and who made so certain of success, had not reckoned on one counteracting power,—the affection which Irrend bore to his brother. Often did the parting words of Seele,—"My brother, come back! come back!" ring in the ears of the captive.

"There was a time," thought Irrend, as in the noonday heat he reclined by the Fountain of Pleasure, "there was a time when, with Seele and me, thoughts, hopes, fears, were in common. There was nothing which we shared not together. Ah! those were blissful days; but we are sundered now. He presses on—I linger here; his face is turned towards the mansion of our Father,—I dwell with that Father's worst foe! If Seele be right, I must be wrong; if Seele be safe, I am in danger; if Seele be happy, what misery is mine! Pride tells me that my powers are

greater than my brother's,—that I am more clear in my judgment than he,—that the path which he treads is that which only the poor and ignorant seek. But if so, why this oppression at my heart? why do I seem scarcely able to collect my thoughts for prayer? Now that Pride and Self-indulgence are both absent for awhile on various errands, I will for once examine and rub up the golden cup of Conscience."

And so, in that quïet hour, when there was no sound but the unheeded drip of the fountain,—for the false humming-birds lay hidden from the sultry glare under the petals of the flowers,—Irrend took his cup from his bosom, and rubbed it till the polished surface of the metal shone as brightly as a mirror. Startled, indeed, was Seele, as he bent over the wondrous cup, to behold the reflection of his own face, which Conscience gave to his view. The fearful stain of *leprosy* was upon it,—of the disease which no man can cure! Irrend no longer gazed on the enchanted mirrors of Pride; he saw himself as he really was, and with a sudden impulse of despair, he flung himself upon the earth.

"Is it for this," he exclaimed, "that I have loitered in this Palace of Death? Is it for this that I have thrown away all the bright hopes held out by Faith? Were I to meet my brother, he would shun me lest I should infect him! Why should I speak of meeting, —I feel,—oh! misery;—I feel that I have no longer strength to rise. I must lie here in helpless weakness, growing day by day more wretched, until the tyrant at last give over his prey to his executioner, Death. Oh! warnings neglected, counsels thrown away, golden opportunities lost,—how they return to my memory now, but to fill my heart with despair!"

How long Irrend lay in this state he scarcely himself could have told. Suddenly it seemed to him as if a soft whisper were breathed in his ear, and he recognised the voice of Faith, though he could see no form at his side. The whispered words were these,—"Those who can pray need never despair." Clasping his hands together, bending his eyes to the earth, as though he felt himself unworthy to look upwards, the miserable leper prayed; again, and yet again, he cried for mercy and grace.

Then, as Irrend turned to gaze on his golden cup, he saw a liquid rising within it; slowly it rose, and with it rose the hope of the unhappy captive. Eagerly Irrend raised the cup to his fevered lips,—deeply he drank of its contents; the draught was not sweet and delightful, like that which Seele had enjoyed,—the liquid was medicine, not wine, but medicine was what Irrend most needed. There was that in the blessed beverage which was an antidote against all the honied poison given by Pride. Health gradually came with the draught; the languid eye became bright, the leprous stain passed away, and with a new strange sense of vigour, Irrend sprang to his feet.

It is scarcely needful to tell to what use the rescued victim put his newly recovered strength, how with dread lest he should be delayed in making his escape, again Irrend fled to the still open door. Rapidly he sped on the narrow path, fearing even the shadow of Sin! Sometimes he seemed to hear the sounds of pursuit; they only served to increase his speed. Irrend stopped not, as Seele had done, to gather the glittering ore which

sparkled close to the path; he dared not trust himself to pause to rest, nor even to pluck a wild flower. So much time had been lost already, and Pride or Self-indulgence might be pressing hard on his track.

Irrend was not long to tread the narrow path alone. He heard a well-known voice before him singing joyful songs of praise. Seele was travelling onward in peace with but *one* care on his mind, *one* unsatisfied wish in his heart, "O that I were but given my brother!" A thousand times had that desire taken the form of a prayer, and now that prayer was to be answered. There was a step upon the path behind him, a loving grasp was on his arm, an eager voice uttered his name, and with a delight beyond all earthly delight Seele clasped once more to his heart his rescued brother!

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOOKING WITHIN.

"AUNT EVA," said Bertie, "you have made Pride the most dangerous of all those three wicked servants; now I don't see so much harm in Pride. Self-indulgence brings drunkenness, greediness, selfishness, sloth, and many other sins besides; covetousness leads to meanness, dishonesty, gambling,—more evils than I can count; but what does Pride do to hurt us?"

"It hardens the heart and blinds the eyes," replied Eva.

"It made Irrend think himself well when he was ill," observed Diana.

"Pride is utterly opposed to the spirit of the gospel, and innumerable are the warnings against it contained in the Scriptures. The

world, indeed, shows it indulgence because it *is of the world*, but what saith the Word of God? *Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Learn of me*, said the Saviour, *for I am meek and lowly. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

"But is there not a proper pride?" asked Bertie; "I have heard even Mrs. Gray say that a man must have proper pride. It keeps him from being cringing and mean."

"One who walks through this world, dear Bertie, with his eye fixed upon a heavenly crown, is never likely to be *cringing* or *mean*. Lowly as his spirit may be, he knows that he has been *bought with a price*, and that he is called to glorify his Saviour in all his dealings with men. He needs no worldly *pride* to keep him from what is unworthy of a Christian."

"When you talk about pride," said Diana, "what kind of pride do you mean? Everybody seems to have a different thing to be proud of. The duke is proud of his rank, Lady Waters is proud of her money."

"Eleanor is proud of her beauty, Warren—" began Bertie, but with uplifted finger and reproving glance, Eva de Vere cut him short.

"It is our part, dear boy, to find out on what point pride attacks ourselves, not to seek out the failings of others. There is perhaps no sin that tempts the soul in such a variety of forms. There is pride of birth, pride of intellect, pride of wealth, pride of personal appearance,—and spiritual pride, perhaps the most dangerous form of all."

"What is spiritual pride?" asked Diana.

"The pride of the Pharisee in the parable, who said, *Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.* That man had the leprosy of sin upon him, but pride had blinded his eyes to his state. For another instance from the Bible of spiritual pride, turn to the seventeenth verse of the third chapter of Revelations, and read the Lord's message to the Church of Laodicea.

Bertie took up the little purple Bible which was his aunt's constant companion, and turning over to the place which she had mentioned, read aloud the solemn words which the Saviour addressed to the spiritually proud.

"*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and in-*

creased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see."

"I never heard that part of the Bible before," said Diana; "and I do not understand it at all. Who is poor, and blind, and naked, and yet thinks himself rich, and wanting nothing?"

"The message was sent in the first place to an erring Church in Asia; it is uttered day by day to each proud self-righteous soul. If the evil one can persuade us that we are rich in goodness, we will never pray heartily for grace. If he make us satisfied that we are clothed in our merits, we shall never seek anxiously for the *white garments, washed in the blood of the Lamb.* If we believe that we are in health, we will not ask the help of the Good Physician. It is only when we know ourselves to be sinners, that we heartily turn to the Saviour."

"Ah! I see," said Bertie thoughtfully, "why Pride is such a dangerous foe. He won't let us know our peril. If Irrend had not examined his Conscience, and rubbed it till it was bright, he never would have found out that he had any leprosy at all."

"Would the medicine which he took from the cup have cured any kind of pride-sickness?" asked Diana.

"Grace, the precious gift of God, is a medicine for every disease of the soul."

"But I thought," said Bertie very gravely, "that there is only one thing that can wash away sin, and that is the blood of our Lord."

"True, most true," replied Eva. "It is through that precious blood *alone* that sin is forgiven, or heaven opened to the believer. But we need a preparation for heaven, we need purity of heart, which is given by the grace of God's Holy Spirit."

"We have the Bible," said Bertie.

"But how is it that so many read the Bible without heeding its warnings, or caring for its precepts, or living as though they believed it? The word of God is a seed in the heart, but

if it be not watered by Grace, it can never bring forth the fruits of the Spirit."

"I am so glad," exclaimed Diana, "that you made poor Irrend find Seele. I was afraid that Seele had got on such a long long way, that they would never have met again."

"I did not mean," said Eva with a smile, "that the separation of the twins was separation in body. Two may live in the same house, two may share the same meals, tasks and amusements, and yet be almost as truly separated, as if they belonged to different worlds."

There was a puzzled expression in little Diana's blue eyes.

"Do you not see?" interrupted Bertie, whose quicker mind had grasped the idea which the allegory was meant to convey. "Suppose that you and I are Seele and Irrend. You go straight through the Forest of Temptations, that is, you won't turn away from the right; you have nothing to do with Self-indulgence, and as for Covetousness you hate and despise him. Now I, still living beside you, walking, talking, playing, just as you do, am staying in the Palace of Deceits. Not that I mean to do so," added

the boy with a smile, "but I want to make matters plain. Now you can see well enough that in this case our *souls* would not be together; you would be by a long distance nearer to heaven, and you would be sad enough when you thought of poor Bertie being left in danger."

"I should pray as Seele did!" cried Diana with warmth, "I should pray with all my might, 'Oh! that I were given my brother!' and then perhaps I should find at last that you were following close behind."

"That has been the joyful experience of many," said Eva. "For nine weary years the mother of the famous Augustine prayed for her son. He was a slave to Self-indulgence, he was a prisoner in the Palace of Deceits. But she hoped and prayed continually, till they both, with exceeding joy, trod together the path of salvation."

"Aunt Eva," said Bertie, laying his hand upon that of the invalid, "don't you think that I am learning the way to open your silver casket? I really fancy that I've sometimes caught a glimpse of the mirror that's in it, for you see I've had a good deal to do with Self-

indulgence myself; I like to drink of Pleasure, and I rather suspect that Pride is pretty often at my elbow."

"I'm sure you're not proud!" cried Diana.

"When I rub up my Conscience well I see that I am," said Bertie. "I like to be thought sharp and clever, and as strong and bold as a lion. But since Pride is such an enemy I must try and escape from his grasp."

Eager in conversation, Bertie had quite forgotten the presence of Stephen, as his back was turned towards his brother who remained in perfect silence. It is possible that while the youth was drawing the likeness of his aunt on the paper, he was tracing, far more distinctly than Bertie could do, a resemblance to himself in the victim of Pride.

CHAPTER XIX.

GRAND NEWS.

"STENIE," said Bertie to his brother, as they started from the door of Mayflower Cottage, "will you mind driving back alone? Will you mind our turning off to the path over the fields as soon as we get to the stile?"

"You may go any way that you choose," replied Stephen, "but the little maid here had better take her seat at my side. Mine is rather a slow coach to be sure, but still riding is better than walking."

"You are very kind," began Diana, "but—"

"But you see," said Bertie, as she paused, "that it is Di who particularly wants to go by the fields, and I don't like her to go alone. She is carrying a pair of cuffs of her own knitting to Betty Miller, whose cottage is just on

the way, you can see its red chimneys over that hedge."

"Betty Miller!" cried Stephen Vane. "Why surely that is the good creature who nursed my mother through a long illness, when I was quite a little boy."

"She wants nursing herself now," observed Bertie; "she is half blind, and quite lame, and suffers dreadfully from the rheumatism. I don't wonder that she suffers, her clothes look so wretchedly thin."

"And you have helped her, I suppose?" said Stephen.

"No, stupid fellow that I was, I had spent every penny of my money. How I should have liked to have bought her that famous grey shawl which I saw hanging up in Jenkins' shop. But Di, little duck that she is, gave Betty her very last shilling, which she was keeping to buy a charm with, and—"

Diana was ashamed to hear of her own kind deeds, so off she ran to the stile.

"Wait a bit, Di!" shouted Bertie; "you can never get over without me; your dress is sure to be caught!"

Betty Miller was, as might be expected, de-

lighted with the gift of the cuffs of the young lady's own knitting. She was, as usual, cheerful and bright, seeing the loving care of her God in every kindness shown by His children.

Bertie and Diana enjoyed their homeward walk exceedingly. They were in high spirits at the unusual graciousness which had been displayed by their elder brother. Stenie had forgotten to play the tyrant, he had given himself no airs, he had not called Bertie by one bad name, and then he had been so gentle in his manner towards Aunt Eva.

"I suppose that we shall be in time for the second breakfast, observed Diana, as she lightly tripped over the frosted grass.

"I don't intend to take any," said Bertie resolutely; "remember what aunty told us about the clergyman being laughed at for loving his salmon, and losing his influence for good."

"But you are not a clergyman," cried Diana, "and I don't suppose that you mean to influence Lady Waters, or Warren," she added with her merriest laugh.

"No, I should think not," said Bertie, joining in her mirth; but he soon added more gravely, "yet I don't think that any one ought

to be able to call a Christian boy a glutton, and you remember what Lady Waters said about that unlucky business of the fish and the flounce. I must be specially on my guard now. I felt my pride stirred up when Lady Waters was speaking, and I determined at the time that she never should be able to speak so again; but aunty gave us, to-day, a better motive than pride, for never doing anything that even the worldly could think low or mean."

As soon as the young Vanes entered Aspen Hall, they heard the voice of Lady Waters calling to them from her own boudoir, a very elegantly furnished apartment, which they were rarely permitted to enter.

"Here's something new," whispered Diana to her brother, "what can Lady Waters want with us there?"

The Vanes found the lady alone, seated on a sofa of blue satin damask. Her face was flushed, her expression smiling, her manner that of a person who has some pleasant cause for excitement.

"I've great news to give you, my dears," said she, in a tone unusually gracious; "you

will have a great deal to put in your next letter to your father in China."

Bertie and Diana were on the tiptoe of expectation.

Lady Waters was perhaps afraid of overwhelming them by letting out her news all at once, she would give it to the Vanes drop by drop.

"What do you think of his grace the Duke of Drayton?" she inquired, still with a smile upon her face.

"He's a funny little man," said Bertie.

The smile instantaneously changed to an expression anything but pleasant. Lady Waters drew herself up, and turning to Diana, as if Bertie were beneath her notice, she said in a dignified tone, "His grace has been here to-day."

"Oh!" said Diana, who began to think that the news was nothing very great after all.

"And your cousin, my daughter Eleanor," the worldly mother's heart swelled with pride as she spoke, "has consented to become the Duchess of Drayton!"

Bertie was so taken by surprise that he whistled, to the very great disgust of the

lady. Diana opened her blue eyes wide, and said that that was grand news indeed.

"And now you may leave me," said the lady, motioning towards the door, "I have much to think of, much to do, innumerable letters to write announcing the happy event."

The Vanes were glad enough to make their retreat to their little study at the end of the passage. Bertie carefully closed the door, and then threw himself down on a chair.

"Oh! it's wicked, wicked!" he exclaimed, striking the table with his fist; "it's all *the pride of life!* Eleanor cannot like that man. I'm sure that she does not like him. She would never look at him twice if he did not happen to be a duke!"

"But she will have to promise, won't she," asked Diana, "to love, honour, and obey him?"

"She'll be knowing all the time that she is making a promise which she won't find it possible to keep; and just think of doing that in church! It seems such a dreadful mockery."

"But think what a grand wedding there will be!" exclaimed Diana; "what fine com-

pany, and carriages, splendid dressing, and speeches, and favours, presents, and cake!"

"It will be Pride taking his victim to the Fountain of Pleasure in the Palace of Deceits; but won't Eleanor find the drops bitter? Oh, won't they be bitter?" cried Bertie.

CHAPTER XX.

REST.

LITTLE was talked of or thought of at Aspen Hall but the approaching grand event. Eleanor received congratulations with an air of cold haughty indifference. She neither looked well nor happy. Stephen heard the news with but little surprise; he had perhaps guessed the reason why Lady Waters had wished to part with her young relations so soon.

Eva's ointment had so greatly relieved the pain in Stephen's ankle, that he was inclined, on the following morning, to try to walk over the fields, instead of employing the donkey-chair—a conveyance quite unworthy of the cousin of the future Duchess of Drayton. Prudence, however, prevailed, and Stephen started from the lodge in his humble equipage,

carrying with him a parcel wrapt up in thick brown paper.

The Vanes found Eva looking more languid than on the preceding day. She heard the news of Eleanor's engagement with interest, but not with pleasure.

"I'm afraid that you must finish all your story to-day, Aunt," said Bertie; "for though we shall certainly come here to-morrow, we shall not be able to stay for more than ten minutes, the train starts so early for London."

"Perhaps Aunty is not well enough to tell us a story at all," said Diana, looking fondly into the pallid countenance of the invalid; though I should just like to hear if Seele and Irrend reached the Bright Land quite safely, and were happy in the home of their Father."

"I must try at least not to leave both of them in the Forest of Temptations," said Eva, with a faint smile.

CONTINUATION OF EVA'S STORY.

For some time Seele and Irrend sped happily on their way, often looking into their golden cups, often seeking for Grace, or taking

out their Father's letter to cheer their hearts by the way.

"There is but one thing that troubles me now," said Irrend once to Seele, "and that is that I have often heard that a terrible enemy called Death sometimes meets travellers in this forest."

"I have heard of him, too," replied Seele. "I remember that Self-indulgence was wont to shudder if any one chanced so much as to name him, and that he was regarded in the Palace of Deceits as the most dreadful of evils."

"I believe," said Irrend, lowering his voice, "that Death is kept in some secret corner of that palace as the executioner of Sin; but that he often walks abroad, and that none whom he seeks can escape him."

"Let us talk of something else," said Seele; "I do not like even the thought of Death."

It was not long after this conversation that the twins entered on a part of the forest where the path was difficult, and much tangled with the thorns of a plant called Sickness, which has berries black and bitter, which no one would willingly taste. Irrend walked firmly and briskly onward, pushing the brambles

aside; but Seele, who was weaker, and differently clad from his brother, was often caught by the thorns.

"Oh! but these cruel brambles make my journey a weariness to me!" exclaimed Seele, almost in despair. "Look how my flesh is wounded; look how my garments are torn!"

Irrend grieved for the trouble of his twin, and helped him on as well as he could; but his power to aid was but small.

"Let us pray," he said; "let us pray!"

And as they prayed, a sweet draught of patience rose in the cup of Seele. He drank it, and went on refreshed. Less painful grew the wounds in his flesh, and he felt a holy calm even on that path of suffering and trial.

But soon the way grew even more tangled. Irrend, who was walking a little in advance, was startled by a cry from his brother.

"Oh! Irrend, Irrend, I cannot get free; the thorns have caught me prisoner. They pierce me on every side; I can bear the pain no longer!"

In vain Irrend, with anxious affection, endeavoured to release his struggling brother. No human efforts could avail, he at length

gave up in despair the attempt to relieve poor Seele. Irrend could but weep and pray in deep distress beside the helpless sufferer.

"Oh, Seele!" he exclaimed in bitter grief, "such a fear is upon my soul! What if that terrible Death should come while you are held prisoner here! then, indeed you could not escape him!"

The words made Seele struggle more violently than before to get loose from the cruel thorns, but they only sank deeper in his flesh!

"Shall I release you?" said a low voice near.

Both Seele and Irrend started to behold a stranger beside them, clad in a long dark robe.

"Why do you fear me?" said the stranger gently; "I am no enemy, but a friend. I come as a messenger from your Father. He wills not that his feeble son should longer tread so painful a path. He has sent me to bring safely home to him a beloved child. Wherefore then should you fear me?"

"We thought," said the trembling Seele, "that you might be Death, the executioner of Sin!"

The stranger gently put back his dark robe, and Seele beheld with surprise an angel form, with a countenance radiant and calm.

"I am different; oh, how different!" said the stranger, "from him who lurks in the Palace of Deceits, though mortals may call us by the same name. I never come but to those who are treading the narrow path; and I come as a messenger of peace; I come as the herald of joy. The world may term me 'Death,' but in the Bright Land my name is 'Rest.'"

"I do not fear thee," murmured Seele, looking up with placid trust into the calm deep eyes of the stranger. "Oh, release me from these torturing thorns, and bear me home to my Father!"

"Oh!" cried Irrend, bursting into tears, "if you take him, take me also. I cannot bear to walk through this gloomy forest alone. I will be desolate without my brother!"

"I will come and re-unite you one day," replied Rest; "but till then you must bravely and patiently walk in the path of duty, looking forward to the blissful time when separation shall be no more, when your trials shall

all be ended, and your cup overflow with endless delight in the blessed home of your Father."

Then gently the stranger bent down, and while Seele lay passive and quiet, released him from the thorns one by one. Irrend wept; but Seele wept not. Placid hope beamed in his eye; he could look upward and smile! Then as the last thorn was broken away, his eyelids quietly closed, his head sank on the shoulder of Rest, and he slept the sleep of the blessed!

Eva was too much exhausted for further effort. Stephen rose, for he saw that the truest kindness to her would be to shorten the visit. Many were the promises made to come and see her early on the following day, —promises answered by a smile and faint pressure of Eva's delicate, almost transparent, hand. Hardly a word was uttered by the Vanes for some minutes after they had left the cottage; a vague fear rested on the heart of even the youngest of the party.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CHRISTIAN GRACES.

"HERE we are at the stile," observed Stephen; "here, I suppose, we will divide."

"Well," replied Bertie, "I should like to say 'good-bye' to the nice old woman. We shall have no time to look in on her to-morrow."

"Will you take this to her?" said Stephen, drawing forth the brown paper parcel mentioned in a former chapter. It slipped from Bertie's hand as he took it, and dropped on the muddy road.

"Awkward chap that I am!" cried Bertie.

"Never mind," said Stephen with good humour; "no harm is done, save to the paper. Pull it off, and all will be right." Bertie pulled off the soiled cover, and, to his surprise, beheld an excellent warm grey shawl.

"Why, if this is not the very shawl that I saw hanging up in Jenkins' shop!" he exclaimed.

"I am glad that Thomas has fulfilled my little commission so exactly," said Stephen.

"Thomas!" echoed Diana, "why, I thought that you told him to bring you a pair of fine worked slippers and a box of cigars!"

Stephen smiled on the little girl. "Some fairy, Di," said he, "must have changed my fox-head slippers into a stout shepherd's plaid; and as for the box of cigars, did you ever see any like these?" and he playfully threw round her neck a slender elastic chain, from which hung a little cornelian anchor, cross, and heart.

"Oh, Stenie, how kind, how—;" but Stenie did not wait for her thanks; he was urging his donkey to speed; and if its pace was somewhat different from that of either Lightfoot or Chester, he felt, perhaps, more pleasure at that moment than if he had been mounted upon either. For almost the first time in his life, Stephen Vane had wrestled with Self-indulgence, and thrown him!

"Oh, are they not beautiful?" exlaimed

Diana, as she examined the gift of her brother. "They are even prettier than the little fan!"

"And they have some meaning in them, too, Di," said Bertie, when, after swinging himself over the stile, he held out his hand to his sister; "they stand for Faith, Hope, and Charity. Those three are *not of the world*," he added, as he pursued his way across the fields with Diana, "and I think that they are given us instead of Self-indulgence, Covetousness, and Pride."

"The three seem as if they answered to the other three," said Diana.

"Or rather as if they were opposed to them, like mortal foes," observed Bertie. "Let's see if we can't trace it all out, and have a little allegory of our own. There's Faith, that fights against Self-indulgence; for if we *believe* God's promises and threats we must *say* '*No*' *to self*, we must use self-denial, for we know that if we live to the flesh we shall die, that's a truth that we read in the Bible."

"But how can Hope conquer Covetousness?" asked Diana, who usually left her brother to answer such questions as required reflection.

"Don't you see?" cried Bertie with anima-

tion, "Hope of a heavenly throne, and a crown of life, and a treasure laid up above, makes us care little for earthly wealth. Hope makes us look so gladly towards the skies, that we can't much notice the sparkle of the gold that Covetousness strews at our feet."

"And Charity won't let Pride in," said Diana, for I remember that St. Paul wrote, *Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.*"

"Yes, and Pride hardens the heart, while Charity makes the heart tender. Pride says 'I thank God that I am not as other men are,' Charity tries to think well of others."

In such conversation passed the time till the Vanes arrived at the cottage. They had the pleasant surprise of finding there little Teddy. He was playing with a kitten in the corner, but on catching sight of his kind friends he ran up to his grandmother with the joyful cry; "Them a' coming, them a' coming, Granny!" His little feet were no longer to be seen through their worn-out covering; the child could not rest till he had shown his new warm socks to his friends. "Teddy warm now!" he exclaimed.

"And Granny must be warm too," said

Bertie; "just see what a fine thick shawl my brother Stenie has sent her."

I will not dwell on the pleasure caused by the seasonable gift, a pleasure shared by those who had brought it. Many and fervent were the blessings with which the aged Christian parted from those whose kindness had cheered her lonely lot. "God will not forget your goodness to me," she said, with tearful eyes; "I cannot recompense you, but He will recompense. May He give you His grace here, and His glory in the better world to come."

"Don't the blessing of the poor seem to warm one's heart?" said Bertie to his sister, after they had quitted the cottage, and waved their good-bye to the curly-headed child who had watched their departure from the door.

"I should be happy, very happy," said Diana, "if only dear Aunt Eva were well, and if poor Vicars were allowed to stay in her place. She told me last night, after we had read a Psalm together, that she thought that this sad business would serve her as a lesson through life, and make her dread the least approach to deceit."

"She pays dear for the lesson," observed Bertie.

"But if she trusts in God, and prays to Him, and tries to walk in His ways, do you not think that He will help her?" asked Diana. "Poor Vicars told me that she had been finding such comfort in the verse, *Casting all your cares upon Him, for He careth for you.* I do think that God will hear her prayers, and not leave poor Vicars to want."

Diana's expectations were fulfilled sooner than she herself had expected. On reaching Aspen Hall she went up to her own room to prepare for the morrow's journey; she found Vicars packing her box, and was struck at once by the expression of thankful joy upon the face of the maid.

"Oh, Miss Diana, I am sure that you will be glad to know I'm so happy!" exclaimed Vicars, as she turned round on hearing Diana's light step.

"Lady Waters will let you stay, will she not?" asked Diana, anticipating good news.

"Oh, no, Miss, it is not that, it is something a great deal better," cried Vicars. "I have heard to-day from my last dear mistress, who

is at Malta;" and with trembling eagerness the maid drew a letter from her pocket. "She says that if I should happen to be looking for a place, she would be so happy to have me with her, and that a friend of hers, who is going out, would take me under her charge."

"That's good news indeed," cried Diana, clapping her hands; "and you will be likely to get stronger, Vicars, if you pass the winter in a warm sunny place like Malta."

"I believe it will be the saving of my life, Miss," said the maid, her sentence interrupted by a cough; "no one knows how I've dreaded the winter in a cold bleak place like this, but I was so anxious to keep my situation. And it's not only this that makes me so thankful to go back to my last dear lady. I'll not have the temptations with her that I have had in this grand bustling house. Oh, Miss Diana, the change will be good for my health, but better, better still for my soul."

The last evening spent by the Vanes at Aspen Hall was exceedingly pleasant. Lady Waters, perhaps with a view to leave an agreeable impression on departing guests, was unusually kind. She gave Diana a lovely nosegay

of late-blowing roses to carry to London, and promised that a piece of Eleanor's wedding-cake should find its way to Bertie.

"Aunt Eva shall have my roses, I will carry them to her to-morrow morning," whispered Diana to her brother.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

AT an earlier hour than usual the Vanes started for Mayflower Cottage, Diana carrying the roses in her hand. Stephen had so far recovered from the effects of his sprain as to try the path through the fields. It was a glorious morning! The sun, but lately risen, poured a flood of golden light from his throne of rosy clouds, sparkling upon the dewdrops, and giving new beauties to the landscape clad in the loveliest tints of Autumn. Loud sang the redbreast on the hedge; and cheerfulness and health seemed to breathe in the fresh morning air. Diana's cheek wore a brighter tint than her roses. Never had the beautiful crimson creeper on Eva's cottage flushed to a richer hue, or the sunbeams on her diamond-paned window looked more like glittering gems.

"How strange that the shutters should be half shut!" exclaimed Diana; "Aunt Eva always is up by this hour."

"And she expected us early to-day," added Bertie.

A look of anxiety passed over Stephen's face, and the three Vanes instinctively quickened their pace. They were met at the door by the sobbing maid.

"My aunt—is she—" Stephen could not finish the sentence; a burst of grief from the girl was sufficient reply. Cold with emotion, silent with dread, the three Vanes entered the apartment where they had beheld the sufferer last.

Sufferer no more! How beautiful lay the still form as in placid slumber, the slender fingers clasped as if the last thought of the mind had been prayer, A sweet, peaceful expression was on the cold lips.

> "Still, still they seemed as they forbore to smile,
> And wished repose, but only for awhile."

With a feeling of solemn awe Stephen knelt by the sleeping one whose earthly pilgrimage was ended. Those lips, silent in death, more forcibly impressed on his soul than they ever

had done in life the sacred words of Scripture; *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. The world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

Sobbing as if her heart would break, Diana strewed over the dead the flowers which she had brought for the living. Eva herself looked like a pale sweet flower, gathered in its beauty for heaven.

"Oh, this cannot, cannot be death," sobbed the child.

In a broken voice Bertie whispered, while fast gushed the tears from his eyes; "Oh, no, remember her own parting words. It is the gentle angel that has come to take her home to her heavenly Father; it is not Death—it is *Rest!*"

My tale is drawing to a close; but perhaps my readers, ere we part, may not be unwilling to hear something of the later fortunes of those whose characters I have tried to trace in my story.

And first as regards the inmates of Aspen Hall.

Warren continued his career in intemperance

with quickening impetus, like that of a stone rolled down a hill. He gave the full rein to inclination; he denied himself no pleasure; he feasted and drank, he laughed, he sang, he would spend whole days in field-sports, whole nights at the gaming-table, or sitting over his wine. It is scarcely needful to add in what such a course ended; excess naturally brings its own punishment with it. Gout and other painful maladies shattered the strength of which Warren had once been proud, till he lost all power of enjoyment. The choicest dainties had no flavour for him, no amusement could please; life became a hateful burden; and, tortured by pain, the wretched man grew so irritable that at last even his nearest relatives shunned his chamber of sickness. Such was the reward of Self-indulgence.

Lady Waters had her desire, she saw her daughter a duchess; but even before the wedding took place, she had begun to quarrel with the bridegroom about the marriage-portion of the bride. Both Lady Waters and the duke were exceedingly fond of money, and, as has been the case in innumerable instances, it formed a subject of dispute. There was a law-suit

regarding the intentions of the late Sir John Waters, as they had been expressed in a very ambiguous manner in his will: this had the effect of completely dividing the mother-in-law and son-in-law, as well as that of wasting much of the money of both. Lady Waters had only to look forward to an unloved and unloving old age, when death must rob her for ever of the wealth which she had valued beyond her own soul, and no metal be left to her but "the tinsel that shines on the dark coffin-lid!" Such was the reward of Covetousness.

And Eleanor, the haughty Eleanor, in her splendid bridal attire, was far more to be pitied than Eva de Vere in her shroud. She had sold her happiness for an empty title. She had married a selfish tyrant; and in her life-long slavery it was little comfort to her that her fetters were made of gold. Such was the reward of Pride!

It is pleasant to turn from such sketches of the vanity of worldly pursuits which impress on our minds the truth,—

> "The greatest evil we can fear
> Is to possess our portion here,"

to look on a brighter picture.

Not in vain had been the gentle counsels of Eva de Vere, but her death had done more than her life. Stephen returned from his visit to Aspen Hall so much altered from the vain selfish youth that he had so lately appeared, that those who had known him before could hardly credit the change. He had gained an object in life; that object was not to pamper self, to hoard up gold, or to gratify pride, but to glorify God by performing his duty towards man, with that perseverance in well-doing which only grace can bestow.

Years as they rolled on, drew only more closely the tie between Bertie and Diana Vane. Cheerfully and lovingly the brother and sister walked together through the Forest of Temptations, with their hopes on the Bright Land beyond. Often would they remind each other of the pleasant hours spent in Mayflower Cottage, in trying to open the SILVER CASKET, and find the mirror within. Never had they cause to regret their early resolution to turn from the Palace of Deceits, and in the fresh morning of their days to devote themselves to their God. Grace in the conscience, Hope in the heart, with Faith for a leader and guide,

the path of the just is as a shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

The great I envy not,
  Nor seek what worldlings prize;
Mine is a brighter lot
  Whose home is in the skies.
To pride it may be sweet
  Rank, riches, to possess;—
To lie at Jesus' feet—
  This—this is happiness!

Oh! may I part with all
  Ere I these hopes resign;
Lord! keep me lest I fall,
  Nor let my faith decline.
To rest on Thee alone,
  To feel Thy power to bless,
To live and die Thine own—
  This—this is happiness!

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